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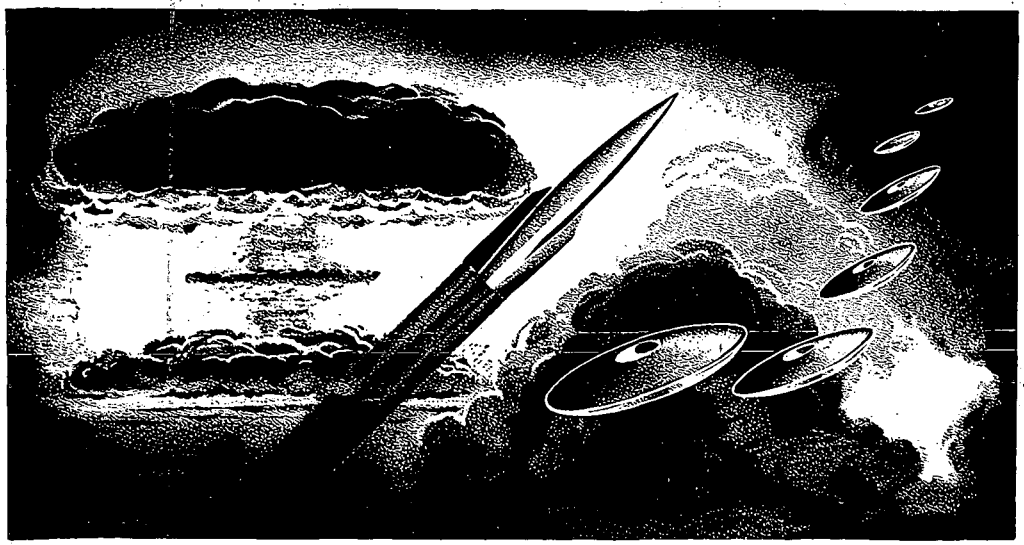

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VOLUME 13 NUMBER 4

All Stories Complete

NINE WORLDS WEST (Novelette—25,000) ..... by Clee Carson 8
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Butch's two man-eating Martian tigers knew about women. The first rule was: Don't eat them!

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You had to become a child again in order to join the strange children on this planet

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Front cover painting by Harold MacCauley, suggested by
a scene from "Nine Worlds West"

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

OUR DAILY mail contains letters from readers in all parts of the world. We are presenting below a letter which we just received in this morning's mail. It contains a plea to which we are sure you will want to reply.

* * *

Dear Editors:

Over here in this battle-torn land, there is a sad dearth of most types of reading material.

Three years ago, prior to my departure from the United States to Japan and Korea, I was an avid reader of your publications. I never missed an issue of your detective and your science-fiction magazines. In fact, I first started reading pulps when I became acquainted with AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

For the past three years, I have missed every single issue of your magazines, except one each of AMAZING and FANTASTIC. This is very disheartening to me. Think of all the wonderful reading I have missed during the time I have been out this way.

I was wondering if you people had any back copies laying around that were not needed, that you would like to send to me for the men here, and for myself. If you could include a plea in your columns for readers in all your magazines, then perhaps the readers could find old copies of past issues to send.

Do not mention anything about patriotism, or helping the war effort, or anything like that to coerce the readers into sending magazines. Just mention that the hours of pleasure they could give to us, in a place where there isn't much pleasure, would more than repay them if they could see us.

Thanking you very much, I remain, in Japanese— Anato no tomadachi.

Sgt. P. V. Catino, RA 13008859
Medical Detachment
82nd F. A. Bn., APO 201
c/o P.M., San Francisco, California

* * *

Dear Sergeant Catino:

We are going through our files for available back issues of our magazines, which we will send to you shortly. And if we know our readers—and we think we do—they will be doing the same thing, so that before much longer, you'll be up to your ears in magazines from home.

Probably the statement that struck us most in your letter, was the simple sentence: "Do not mention anything about patriotism, or helping the war effort, or anything like that to coerce the readers into sending magazines."

It seems to us that patriotism and helping the war effort has everything to do with this, and that you should not hesitate to make your request on those grounds. We think you have probably summed up what most of the boys in uniform far from home, are thinking and feeling. Everything must seem so distant to you—and you probably feel a vast gap in understanding between you and those of us at home who were once an integral part of your lives.

But we want you to know—and we are putting this simply and sincerely—that we can't, and won't, forget you. In the years between one major war and another, the folks at home have a tendency—if not to forget—then at least to try to push the horrors of war out of their minds. To remain with the common pleasantries of every-day living. But the memory of the last major war is still strong within all of us. It's too soon to have forgotten. It should and must always be too soon. Our hearts are with those of you so far from home—and our prayers for your safe return.

Sincerely,

L. E. Shaffer
Managing Editor
Fiction Group

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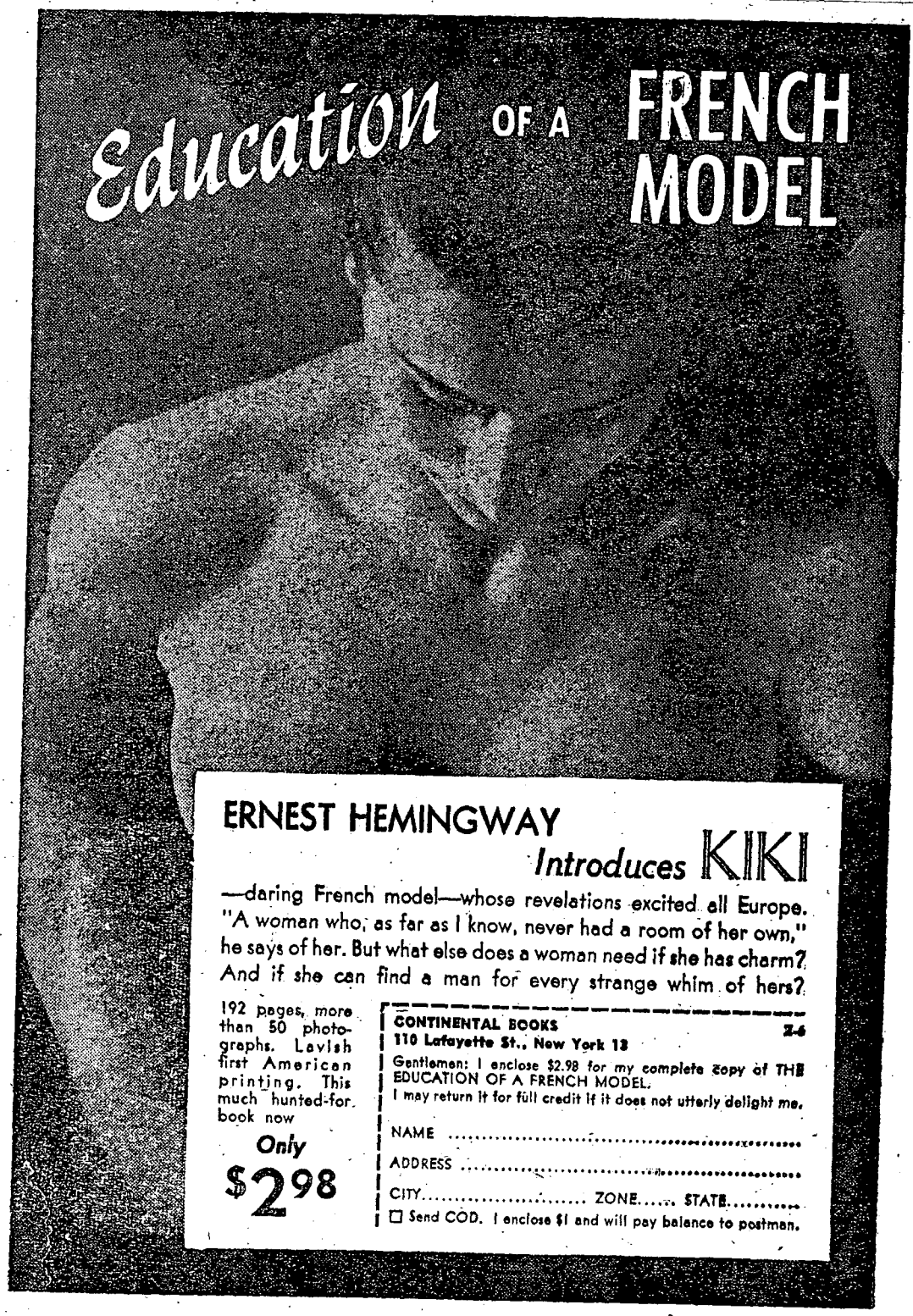

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NINE WORLDS

Greta had time to think of nothing but hanging on. It was like riding a fur rug thrown over a varnished barrel. It was impossible that an animal's skin could hang so loosely

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WEST

By Clee Garson

Terrorized at being ravished by the Hairless Ones, Greta pretended to be a Goddess, only to find a worse fate

THE GIRL said, "I'm looking for a man."

Cort Liggett glanced up from his drink and grinned briefly without humor.

"I don't think you'll have much trouble finding one, sister," he said. "Not with the equipment you've got there."

She was exceptionally tall, willowy, and had hair as black as the seventh sin. She hadn't been speaking to Cort, but rather to Butch Mecropolis, the adventurous Greek who'd come to Mars with the first ship load of emi-

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grants from Earth, in order to establish a liquor house in New Portland where even a discredited pilot could run up a tab.

Her assertion had been heard also by a blond Martian down the bar who liked the ways and the women of Earth people and frequented their city. The Martian got to his feet and came forward, swaggering. "I'm a man, honey. Let's go."

Cort said, "Not the right one though, sonny," and then got off his stool and hit the Martian in the softest spot Martians have—the belly. The Martian folded up and forgot about women as Cort helped him to the door and booted him into the street.

Butch said, "You're damn free and easy with my cash customers. That stuff they carry doesn't grow on trees."

Cort looked a trifle hurt. "I was doing you a favor, Butch. Hit a Marty in the belly, he gets sick. You don't want your floor all dirtied up, do you?"

Cort went back to his drink and Butch Mecropolis turned again to the girl: "What were you saying, miss?"

"I'm looking for a man they told me I might find here. His name is Cort Liggett. He's a pilot."

Cort glanced up again. "Correction," he said. "An ex-pilot. Sit down and I'll buy you a drink."

Butch snorted. "I never saw a guy so open handed with other people's liquor." He moved down the bar, motioning the girl to follow. "What'll you have?"

"A small Lazant. Is this man Cort Liggett?"

"Give her a large Lazant," Cort said. Then to the girl: "Take the load off, babe. The stools are soft and the company leaves nothing to be desired. What's on your mind?"

She sat down and stared at him thoughtfully. "You're a little drunk, aren't you?"

"About as drunk as I can get lately. I used to do much better, but I guess I'm slipping."

"Are you sober enough to talk business?"

"What kind of business?"

"I need a pilot."

CORT STRAIGHTENED with mock dignity. "Madam, I think you should know exactly with whom you are conversing. Cort Liggett is the name. A has-been. A washed-up hot shot. A character black-listed permanently by the Guild of Space Pilots for losing his ship in the Asteroids. Let's have another drink and I'll tell you more." He reached toward his glass but didn't make it. His head went smack down on the bar and he was out.

Butch Mecropolis was there to catch the glass before it went over. "He drinks more than he should." Butch said apologetically, "but it was pretty bad. He saw five of his friends fried to a crisp in a jet backfire. It was a hunting party he took up in the Asteroids—guys he knew. They got drunk and snuck into the pilot room while he went for coffee. They gummed up the controls and got roasted to death for playing around. He didn't really lose the ship. He brought it in on one jet. The bodies of five pals he delivered to the space port in a crippled ship—a job one pilot in a thousand could do. But the Guild made an example of him because it was an unscheduled flight. I think why he drinks is he keeps seeing his friends the way he found them in the control room."

The girl lifted Cort's head and laid it in a more comfortable position on the bar. "I heard about that affair. In fact, I checked into it very care-

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fully. I'm interested only in the part about his being a hot pilot. Where I'm going, I'll need one."

"I can sober him up in a jiffy," Butch said eagerly. "I got some stuff'd wake up a stone statue."

She shook her head. "It can wait until he sobers up. Where does he stay?"

"Palmer Hotel around the corner. Room 601."

The girl got off her stool, lifted Cort expertly. She got her arm around his waist and draped one of his over her shoulders. "I'll take him home," she said. Then, at Butch's look of surprise: "I can handle him alright. I had plenty of experience with my father."

She took Cort to his room and dumped him on the bed. She took his shoes off and then curled up in a chair and went to sleep.

WHEN SHE told him her name was Greta Lansing, he groaned and said: "As long as you're here, go on out and get some coffee. Black and strong. That damn Greek melts dynamite and calls it liquor."

She went without a word, and when she came back he said, "I think I've heard of you. Or your father at least. Didn't he run a black ship* into the forbidden zones up Orion way?"

Greta Lansing nodded. "Dad staked everything on being able to bring a load of thradium back to the Solar markets. He'd lost five fortunes in the space trade and he wanted to get one more and retire. We went to Pentar, out beyond the boundaries."

Cort frowned. "Pentar—"

"That's the oversize Asteroid they call Boss Hagerty's planet. It's beyond Orion, through a bad Asteroid belt."

**A black ship: One unlisted on Space Authority records and thus not given service by a guild pilot.*

"Beyond the boundaries. You know, the Interplanetary Council had a damn good reason for declaring that area out of bounds. It's too far to extend diplomatic protection. Anyone who—"

"I know all about that. But we went anyhow. Sank almost our last dime in a cargo of heavy salt—it's priceless out there. But Boss Hagerty turned his hatchetman on us; a devil named Korbo who stole the load and held Dad as a hostage for another one."

CORT FROWNED. "Those people must be crazy. If they paid you well, they should have known you'd bring another cargo."

"They were afraid not, but there was something more than that. You know how they hate us—love to get their hands on Inner Planetary people. There are stories—"

"I've heard some of them." He took the cold towel off his head and regarded the girl with frankly appraising eyes. She had a tanned, flawless complexion. Her long legs clad in skin-tight space-pants were lush and perfect. She had as beautiful a body as Cort had ever seen. "It's strange this Korbo didn't hold you and send your father back for more salt."

She did not flush under his gaze. She took his eyes and words in a manner indicating her matter-of-fact attitude toward all things, from sex to forbidden space travel. "Dad's reputation is pretty well known, even in the far galaxies. Korbo would have liked to have had me, but the salt was more important, and he was afraid Dad would get drunk and forget all about it."

"You're dad's probably having a hard time of it out there."

"There's no doubt about it."

"How did you get clear of the bad

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areas without him?"

"Korbo is no mean pilot himself. He piloted us to open void and then went back."

"And now you want a non-guild pilot to take you in again with another load of salt to buy your dad back."

"I want a hot pilot. That's why I hunted you up."

"But it's silly. They didn't keep their word the first time. Why should it be any different now?"

"It probably won't be."

"Then why go back? Korbo would take you this time."

"I've got to go back anyhow."

"Do you know what those men out there do to Inner Planetary women, and not just the beautiful ones either—any female from the solar planets?"

"I know. But I've got to chance it. I've got to go back with a load of heavy salt and try to get Dad out of their hands. I think you ought to come with me."

"Why?"

"What have you got to lose?"

"Only my life."

"You're losing that here. You're killing yourself as fast as you can right now. You ought to come, because you'll be a lot happier dying out there. It would be a much cleaner death."

He'd been sitting on the edge of the bed. He got to his feet and reached for her. "The hangover's about gone. So much so, that you're damned attractive to me. I'd be a fool not to kiss you."

She got up and moved toward him. "And I'd be a fool not to let you, if it would help." She knew how to make a kiss further her cause. A long minute later, he pushed her back. "You weren't just promoting. You liked that."

"Of course I liked it, but I was promoting just the same. Will you go?"

"I'll go...alone. You stay here. I'll be back."

"You couldn't get the ship out of berth alone. You're not a guild pilot."

"Neither are you."

"But I'm listed as owner of the Space Wagon, and I've got pilot's papers. I don't have to be Guild."

"All right. We'll start that way and then I'll drop you somewhere to wait."

She kissed him again and another minute passed. "Once I get on the ship—I'll stay."

"WE GO SPACESIDE tomorrow at dawn," Cort said.

Butch Mecropolis reached for a bottle of Lazant and three glasses. "I'll miss you—both of you. We'll drink to clear void and a fast trip."

"For the three of us."

"What are you talking about?"

"We want you to come, Butch. If we hit, it means a country house and eight servants. You always wanted to be rich."

Greta Lansing said, "I have a crew. A good engine room man who will make the trip and three able tube scrapers, but they wouldn't be worth much in case of trouble. Cort says you're a man to have around in a pinch."

"He does, huh?" Butch poured the drinks, frowning the while. "You said how it would be if we hit. How about a miss?"

"It wouldn't be so good, but we won't talk about that," Cort replied.

"Not a chance. I couldn't leave my cats."

Cort turned to Greta. "I didn't tell you. Butch has got the only trained Martian pussies in existence."

"Not the big ones."

Butch grinned with pride. "Yeah, the big six-legged ones. Got hold of

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them when they were three-foot kittens. They're eight feet long now, and one of them has twelve inch fangs." Butch's black eyes softened. "You ought to hear 'em purr."

"Sounds like all the dynamos in the city power plant," Cort said, "but they're pretty cats."

"I'd like to go, but I couldn't leave them. They'd pine away and die."

"You could take them along," Greta said.

Butch was tempted. "Have you got room for their food. They'd need at least five horse carcasses for the trip."

"We'll make room."

"I'll think it over."

Cort got off his stool. "Fine. Be at Number Five Berth at the space field tomorrow before sunup."

"I said I'd think it over."

"Do that. I'll see the horse meat is aboard. See you later."

"You take a hell of a lot for granted," Butch growled.

From the door, Cort called back: "And see you lock this joint up tight. I want to find it the same when we get back."

After Cort and Greta left, Butch prowled up and down the bar talking out loud to himself. "It'd be nice to have money. Maybe then I could afford a job like that black-haired honey. That would be something." Then, he looked in the bar mirror and his ugly face turned sad. "No. No dame would go for my pan, even for all the cash in the System." He picked up the three empty glasses. "Only my cats love me," he sighed, and mopped the bar with a rag.

ON THE following morning, two six-legged tigers, large enough to lift and carry a Martian hill buffalo, slithered through the dark streets of New Portland toward the space port. Each wore a solid silver collar to which were attached silver chains. The chains tinkled in the cold morning air, and more than one early riser fled panic stricken through the alleys and away.

Butch Mecropolis leaned backward on the chains and slid along on his heels. He could tell by the tone of the deep growls that his cats were happy. "Relax, babies," he crooned, the fat on his gross body bouncing like jelly at every step. "Papa's taking you for a ride among the stars. Maybe you'll find out what Pentarian meat tastes like. Come good luck, maybe you can eat Butch Hagerty. Wouldn't that be something?"

At the space port, the entrance guards stepped aside fast and with the minimum of dignity. "They won't hurt you as long as I say not to," Butch called out cheerily. But the guards were already quite a distance away and probably didn't hear.

Cort was waiting at the ramp. "About time," he growled. "We've been waiting ten minutes. Take them through into the after housing. Put them in the cabin next to the meat. And for Christ's sake, lock the door!"

"They're good cats," Butch replied. "House broken and everything. Give 'em a ton or so of sand, and they won't dirty up the floor a bit. They're clean by nature."

The cats dragged Butch on into the ship and Cort turned to see Greta hurrying back from the clearance office. She was folding a paper and tucking it into her blouse. Her red lips were parted slightly, her eyes bright as the void-fires off Mercury. "Clearance granted," she said.

"Then this is it."

For a moment, as she passed him up the ramp, her face was close to his. "This is it, and—thanks, Cort Liggett."

"Don't mention it. Get aboard and lift her."

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After the ports were secured and the jets fired, Cort stood beside her as she leaned forward from the pilot's chair. "Do you know how to get one of these crates spaceside without breaking every back on board?" he asked.

"Just watch me. You won't even have to sit down. Just hold onto the chair."

From the speaker came the voice from Port Control: "Jet away on eleven." A bell struck a single note which was one, and Greta's eyes were glued to the big red hand on the clock. Under the light blouse, Cort looked down the contour of her rich bosom—saw the breasts rise and fall. He thought how lovely they were, and then a muffled rearward roar nudged the Space Wagon down the five-mile berth-chute, and a blue light flashed on to indicate the ship was no longer earth bound. "Nice," Cort told her. "A little too fast on the right jets, but still nice."

"Thank you, sir. Count ten."

IN THE next ten seconds, the Space Wagon pointed her sleek nose into the heavens and shook off the last pull of gravity with a disdainful flip of her white-hot jets.

"Ten," Cort said.

Greta slid out of the pilot's seat. "Your ship, darling. Be good to her and she'll respond. Please don't knock her nose off on any uncharted solids."

"I'll do my best."

"I'm going to cry, damn it."

"Why?"

"Because yesterday there was so little hope—so much nothing. And now you're here—and Butch with his six-legged cats."

"They'll eat us out of house and home."

"This is one of my helpless moments. I get that way. Right this minute, you could have anything you asked for."

"And me in a pilot's chair. Beat it. I've got to plot course."

Greta went away and Cort sat for a long time in the chair with all the gauges before him. There were one hundred and seven of them and he knew each one—not just from knowledge, but from an instinct that told him when any one of them would go wrong even when they were right. For a moment, he sat back and closed his eyes.

Once a pilot has coursed a thradium hull through void on hot jets, he is never the same. It is the feeling a pilot gets after the first flush of stage fright; it is the blending of space and blood when the void takes a man over; the wedding of flesh and bone and mind and soul to the magnetic nothingness which is the last great barrier between man and God. It is the supreme moment given to a few men when they get that wild, free feeling of immortality.

Cort's heart pounded hard as he remembered the moment of his first takeoff years before. The little ceremony after lessons were learned, tests passed and this was it; after so many had fallen from the hopeful ranks and only a few were left and he was one of them. The C.O. of the Guild gave him his ship at the top of the ramp by the open port. The C.O. pinned his shield on, shook hands and then became human. The words that were traditional—the last words: "Heaven's up there somewhere, boy. Go find it."

Yes, there was something about piloting a space ship that got a man. I'm back again, Cort thought. Back in a pilot's chair. We'll see if I've got the old touch.

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AN HOUR later, Sam French came in from the engine room. He was a small, fine-featured man who looked as though he should be designing lady's hats rather than checking the temperature of jets and keeping atom power evenly distributed. He could have reported over the intercomm, but he wanted to size up the pilot, and the pilot was glad because he wanted to size up French.

"How's the distribution?"

"Good," French said. "Number Three is lagging about five hundred degrees. I'm timing it for wash now. May have to scrape it."

"When do you think we can open up?"

"In about five hours, I'd say."

Cort whistled. "I've known ships that took twelve hours to heat."

"This is a good ship."

"Fine. Let me know when you're ready."

"I will." French turned toward the door, then hesitated: "About those cats," he said.

"Not as bad as they look."

"I'm glad of that. I wouldn't care to be torn up and eaten." But French still looked doubtful as he left the pilot room, and Cort decided he wouldn't be much help if trouble came. And, he felt sure, trouble would certainly come.

The Space Wagon picked up gradually to four thousand on its own increased heat during the next two hours. Cort spent the time in intensive concentration on the plotting board. Satisfied, finally, he straightened and ran a hand though his thick, unruly hair. He stood for a minute, frowning. There was a restlessness, an urge within him which he couldn't analyze immediately. Then, a pair of dark eyes and slim hips arose in imagery before him, and he knew.

He paced swiftly up and down the control room. Hell! Her attitude, her manner, had been practically an invitation. Of this he was pretty sure. But even if he were wrong, she would never be in a more cooperative mood. Why not take advantage of it?"

His conscience hastened to tell him that this was poor sportsmanship, but he scowled his conscience down. After all, she was no callow school girl. Probably not even a virgin. She'd been around and knew what made men tick. No doubt, she was wondering what held him back. Hadn't she said he could have anything he asked for?

Cort went out into the central passageway and up-ship toward the captain's quarters. He stood for a moment, then knocked resolutely on her door. She called "Come in," instantly, and he found the door unlocked.

INSIDE, HE found nothing very feminine. It was a neat, comfortable cabin, but Cort got the impression she hadn't changed a thing since she'd taken it over.

Greta wore a dark blue robe of simple cut over the collar of which billowed the black glory of her hair. Her face was washed clean of makeup and possessed a shininess that gave her the look of a little girl.

She got up from the lounge upon which she'd been lying and smiled at Cort. "How goes the ship, pilot?"

"Jet's heating. Full speed in about three hours."

"So soon? Wonderful. Can I make you a cup of tea?"

Cort stepped forward. Greta stood waiting for him.

Breast to breast, they stared into each other's eyes. She made no move, gave no indication of either approval or disapproval. He raised his arms slowly and drew her close to him. She did not resist. He kissed her and her lips were warm, even though she did not raise her arms nor press herself

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forward. Somewhat doubtfully, he released her.

There was a little fright in her eyes now as she looked up at him, a slight trembling of her body when she said: "You want me, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Badly?"

"Very badly."

"Do you want me to tell you how it is, or do you just want to barge right ahead?"

"Tell me."

"It's this way. You're something pretty special in more ways than one. In what you are and what you've done for me, and you can have me if you want me. If it must be now, I'll promise to cooperate and do my best to see that you're pleased. I may even enjoy it myself. But it won't be the great good thing it could be, because I'll be a little broken hearted about—it. You see, being a healthy, normal animal, I've always dreamed about what it would be like, but in the first part of the dream there has always been a man with his collar on backwards, a ring slipping on my finger and a husband whispering in my ear about loving me very much. As I said, Cort, I'll do my best, but it will no doubt be with tears in my eyes."

He had dropped his arms and backed away from her. He stared at her and he had never in his life seen anyone he wanted more. He turned abruptly toward the door. As he fumbled for the knob, he said, "Full speed in three hours."

"Cort."

"Yes."

"Kiss me."

"You go to hell!"

WITH A SOFT cry, she brushed forward and turned him and drew him down. There was fire on his lips coming from hers, and words she whispered against his teeth while she spoke: "Darling, am I ungrateful? A stinking sport?"

He grinned at her. "Honey, Butch's Martian kitties can eat a horse between them in a few gulps—but they've got nothing on you." He went out and closed the door.

Some three hours later, Sam French's voice came over the intercomm. "Tubes at peak heat. Any time you're ready, Mr. Liggett."

"No time like the present," Cort replied. He dropped into the pilot chair and opened the loud speaker. "To all aboard. Get set for top speed. Butch, hold on to those God-damned cats. Here we go."

He set himself to the controls and the ship trembled and a low rumble was heard from the tubes. He pressed and the tubes whined like a child in agony. Then, the great ship seemed to come alive. It rocked on its axis as the thradium nose split void with a hundred times its previous force.

Each minute the ship appeared to have reached its capacity, but the next minute found it traveling ever faster until the child whine changed to hopeless wailings of a thousand devils in everlasting fire. This, it seemed, was more than metal could stand, but still the Space Wagon increased its speed.

A few minutes later, Cort got out of his chair, just as the door opened and the scared white face of Butch appeared. "How the hell fast is this butter boat traveling?" he asked.

"Slightly less than half a light year a day," Cort told him.

"What are the chances of its blowing up?"

"About one in ten. The odds are far in our favor."

"My poor kitties. They didn't ask to come on this suicide dash. We

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ought to be ashamed of ourselves, putting them in danger."

"Give them an extra horse for breakfast. A little reward for good behavior." Cort grinned, set the automatic pilot, and followed Butch into the passageway.

Came the time, days later, when Greta entered the pilot room and laid her hands on Cort's shoulders as he sat tense in his chair. He had not moved for over nine hours now, and Greta said, "Don't you think you could get a little sleep now?"

Cort watched the radar screen with burning eyes, eternally on the alert for the wandering asteroids which could hurtle out of nowhere straight for the nose of the Space Wagon. "Your pappy," Cort said, "was a hot pilot, honey. So was Korbo, if he brought you through this rock pile without a busted hull."

Three times in as many hours, Cort had saved the ship from annihilation by a feather touch on the jet controls. His mouth was a tight line and his face haggard. But now he loosened a trifle and laid his hand on that of Greta. "I think we're coming into the clear, though. They're thinning out. Try getting some rest yourself."

Greta smiled wearily, went to her cabin and dropped exhausted into her bunk. But only to be awakened within the hour by Cort's voice on the inter-comm: "All passengers—alert for disaster! Alert for disaster!"

GRETA HURRIED down the passageway to find Sam French wringing his hands in the pilot room. "There was absolutely no reason why the tube should blow, Mr. Liggett. It was cleaned less than three hours ago."

Cort turned to Greta as she entered. "Number Four jet tube backfired. The tube-scrapers were burned to a crisp."

Greta went pale under her rich tan. "All...three men?"

"Never knew what hit them. We're in trouble! So near and yet so far."

Butch Mecropolis entered in time to hear Cort's words. "How bad trouble?" Butch asked.

"We're clear of the heavy asteroid fields and bearing on Pentar. But the tube scraping equipment is melted down to a puddle. With the jet wash piling up, she'll go in like a kite in a high wind. We either let gravity take her and hope for the best, or pull away and explode in space."

"There really isn't much to decide, is there?" Greta asked.

"Of course not," Cort snapped. "We go in."

"How long will it be?" Butch wanted to know.

"About an hour."

Butch grinned. "Then we'll find out how hot a pilot you really are."

"Won't we, though," Cort answered. He turned to Greta. "You'd better get dressed, unless you want to land with your legs showing."

Greta left the room and Sam French said, "I'll go back to the engine housing and do what I can."

"You stay away from those jets. We've lost enough men."

"Yes, sir," French said meekly, and there was relief in his voice.

"I gotta see about my cats," Butch said. French followed him out and Cort was alone.

Cort stared sourly at the radar plate. It was practically clear now except for the faint signal from Pentar. No doubt the Space Wagon was also registering on the landside equipment of the small planet. Possibly escort ships had already been dispatched to bring the big ship in.

They're going to wonder no end about our antics from here on in, Cort thought. That is, if they can keep us in range. Cort took a few turns around

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the room. Maybe, he told himself, it's just as well if they lose us. We might live longer that way.

Twenty minutes later, he told the group assembled behind his chair, "We're inside gravity. Prayers are now in order."

SILENTLY, they watched him play lightly with the controls, flirt with the last bit of power left in the smothered jets. The ship nosed upward and described a fantastic five-hundred-mile arc, stood for a moment on her jets, then reversed and dived straight toward the gravity center.

Sweat stood out on Cort's forehead. Another such arc would kill the jets completely and the Space Wagon would come to rest possibly a hundred feet under the surface of Pentar. The glide would have to be made at exactly the right second. Then, if there was enough power in the tubes to respond, and if there were no mountains in the way, the Space Wagon might have a fifty-fifty chance of coming in without killing all on board.

Cort's eyes ached as he stared into the radar plate and watched Pentar rocket toward them. He surveyed the terrain swiftly. The soil seemed a scant inch from his teeth when he pressed the ship into a glide and tried to remember a prayer he'd learned as a child. He didn't recall the prayer, but the Space Wagon leveled sluggishly off, the ground loomed large, and Cort threw himself to the floor directly across Greta's body. Her lips were against his cheek and she whispered, "I'm sorry, darling, about not letting you—"

The little world of the Space Wagon was torn to pieces by a bone-splintering crash.

They piled up like cordwood against the cushioned forward wall of the ship. For a time, they did not breathe nor think, but only lay tense waiting for death. There was a great silence after the rending sounds died.

Then, Cort's clipped voice: "All right! We made it. Now, are we trapped in this cheese box for good?"

Sam French's muffled voice was hopeful: "I don't think she turned over. We're still on the floor."

"I wonder how my cats came out?" Butch said.

Greta's soft breast was directly under Cort's protecting hand. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"I think so. Let's see about the doors."

Cort led the way into the passage and tried the pneumatic switch. It worked. There was a hiss of air and the door opened outward. Cort jumped to the ground and turned to catch Greta as she followed. With a slight grin on his face, he asked, "What was it you said just as we crashed?"

Greta flushed and turned her head away. "I didn't say a word. You must have been hearing things." Cort released her with the thought that he'd seen her blush for the first time.

French leaped down to reveal a badly sprained wrist which Cort bound with a handkerchief. "Looks as though we came through pretty good." Cort said. "Where's Butch?"

The answer came as one of the great fanged cats poked its head out and leaped smoothly to the ground, followed by it's mate. Then, Butch's moon face appeared.

THE CATS snarled and circled off to the left where they crouched side by side, snapping their tails and digging their fangs into the soil.

"Easy babies," Butch crooned. He jumped down and approached them fearlessly to snap the silver chains into their colors. Crooning wordlessly, he led them back toward the ship. "Not a scratch on either one."

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Cort was staring at the Space Wagon with a look of bitterness in his eyes. "Meet a hot pilot," he said, his voice heavy with self contempt. "Maybe I didn't really lose that other ship, but the Guild merely anticipated. There's no doubt about this one."

"You got us in," French said. "Few pilots could have done that."

"I wasn't fishing for compliments. Does anybody know where the hell we are?"

Greta, seemingly unaware of her action, was stroking the head of one of the cats. The beast growled deep in its throat, quivered and sank down at her feet. Butch grinned. "What do you know about that? Maggie likes you. She never took to anybody before. You must have a way with cats."

"I've studied maps of Pentar," Greta told Cort. "It looks to me as though we've come down in the Gormal Desert. If I'm right, there should be heavy forests somewhere south of here. Korbo has lumber camps in the forest he runs with slave labor. The planet's only large city is about ninety miles away."

"Hagerty City, isn't it?"

"That's right. The spot from where Boss Hagerty runs the planet. And he'll be looking for us, of course. We must have registered on his radar."

"No doubt of that." Cort motioned toward Butch. "Come on, Lard. Let's get the space cars out. I don't care much for this God-forsaken section."

Butch followed Cort back into the ship, protesting the while. "Don't call me Lard. I'm not so fat. Just plump and well upholstered."

"Get a hold."

Together, they brought the small, compact cars, one at a time, out onto the ground. Cort crushed the inflation capsules, and immediately rubber frames were blown up to form seating space for three persons in each car.

Cort returned again to the ship and came back with four gun harnesses, each holstering two efficient spectrum guns and one hundred rounds of ammunition.

SCARCELY had the group buckled on the weapons, when a low humming sound turned all eyes to the southwest. The humming increased until a low-flying car raised a rocky butte in that direction and came into view.

It was an antique, outmoded affair, but was handled with efficiency as it circled, seemingly for a landing. It swung low toward the crippled space ship, and four men could be seen riding the platform.

"The tall one," Greta said. "It's Korbo himself! What will we do, Cort?"

"Do?" Cort shrugged, his narrowed eyes on the space car. "What is there to do? Wait and see what happens."

Things happened speedily. Instead of landing, the car swerved sharply and came back with its deck tilted toward the four Earthlings. Cort's reaction was instantaneous. He yelled, "Take cover!" and caught Greta's arm and hurled her roughly into the shelter of the Space Wagon's bulging hull. Butch, standing a few yards away between his cats, dropped to the ground as the Pentarian space car spat a tube of green flame toward the big ship.

Cort's two guns were in action instantly. As the lethal green fire struck Sam French, smashing him into a lifeless pulp, Cort poured two answering streams of heat pellets toward the attackers. One of the ancient car's metal fins melted and dropped away in a stream of molten metal. There was a quick scream from the gunner above as he straightened in a frenzy of agony and pitched to the ground.

"The dirty swine!" Cort grated.

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"They planned to kill us in cold blood! Cut us down like animals! Evidently they didn't expect resistance."

The Pentarian car had swept on by and was circling for another rush. Butch, his face ashen, was erect now and running toward the space ship hull. He labored mightily, hauling his cats behind him, but still found voice to protest, "The dirty bums. They're trying to clean us out! And they got French! What the hell kind of hospitality is this?"

"Boss Hagerty's kind," Cort said, eyes on the Pentarian ship, guns poised for another shot. Then, he quickly holstered the weapons. "They're in trouble. They can't turn with that bad fin. We've got to get aloft and outdistance them. Get your cats into one of the cars, Butch. I'll cover you, and then we'll follow in the other car. Get going!"

As Butch pulled the great beasts toward the nearer car, Greta sprang from the shelter of the hull. "Cover us both," she called out. "I'll get the other car started!"

"Come back here!" Cort yelled. "Stay under cover! I'll take care of that!"

THE PENTARIANS had come around now and were set for another sweep. As they bore in at tree-top level, Butch yelled, "It's no good. The controls on this thing are jammed! We're not going anywhere!"

Cort, his eyes on the Pentarian car, jumped away from the Space Wagon and out onto open ground, hoping desperately to draw the green fire away from the exposed girl who was working desperately with the controls of the second car. "It's no use," she cried. "This one's dead, too!"

Cort's move was more successful than he'd hoped. The gunner upstairs had only a few seconds to direct his fire. Cort's move split his target, and the man couldn't make up his mind which sitting duck to pot. As a result, his fire swept in a line between Cort and Greta, touching neither of them. Cort raised two heat blisters on the airborne craft as it went by, but inflicted no great damage.

Now, Butch went into action. His plump face red from exertion, he pulled his cats from the useless car and ran to Greta who sat helplessly in the other craft. "Can you ride a horse?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer, seized the girl and flung her astride the back of one of the great cats. "Dig your hands into the fur and hang on," he wheezed. "Maggie's been rode before! Head for those rock hills over south! Wait for us there!"

He handed Greta the silver lead chains and gave a shrill whistle. "Get going, babies! Play-time! Big race! Take to the hills! Maggie! Mike! Scat!"

The cats had evidently done this sort of thing before and had enjoyed it. With no further urging, they started away on their twelve legs at a speed no race horse could have begun to equal—two black and orange streaks leveling out across the rough desert floor, with Greta hanging onto Maggie's back like grim death.

Butch turned immediately and fled toward the hull of the Space Wagon. Cort, his narrowed eyes on the slowly arcing Pentarian car, said, "Fast thinking, Butch. Good work! She may get a chance to live a little longer over in those rocks."

"What would you say our chances are?"

The crippled car had nosed around now for another attack. Cort poised his two guns. "Pretty slim. There'll probably be more of them flocking in soon. When they can come at us from

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two directions at once—we're through."

"You know something?" Butch moaned. "I should have stood on Mars."

AS THE two Martian tigers kited toward the rock hills, Greta had time to think of nothing but hanging on. It was like riding a fur rug thrown over a varnished barrel. It seemed impossible to the girl that any animal's skin could slide around its body so loosely, and still remain attached to the bone and muscle underneath.

She was astride the giant cat at a point just back of the forward pair of legs. Maggie's hard shoulder bones, pumping like locomotive driving rods, kept slamming against Greta's thighs in a seemingly deliberate effort to unseat her. Desperately, Greta sought to slide rearward, but only to come perilously close to the claws of the cat's middle legs as they slashed along in deadly rhythm.

Several times, the girl was almost hurled to the rocky desert floor and to possible serious injury. But the long graceful strides of the great-fanged Maggie was exceedingly smooth, and Greta gradually lost her fear of becoming unseated.

This swift retreat from danger was not to her liking, and she would have objected strenuously had she had the opportunity. But Butch's move was so quick and decisive, that Greta was flying across the desert on Maggie's back before she had time to collect her wits.

As the vast, rocky labyrinth ahead loomed larger, she entertained thoughts of reversing her direction and returning to the ship. She made some effort toward doing this, but Maggie entirely ignored the order to turn around.

Then, side by side, the giant cats swept in between two great boulders and began mounting the steep slopes toward the higher reaches of the jagged incline. Sudden panic swept through Greta. Were these beasts never going to stop? They gave no indication of it as they hurtled along sharp-edged ridges and leaped fifty-foot crevasses without breaking stride. Several times Greta closed her eyes as she sailed through space over death traps a thousand feet deep.

As the desert floor fell further and further below, Greta got the odd feeling that Mike and Maggie knew exactly where they were going, so direct was their course and so swift their pace. This she dismissed as foolishness, but the cats kept moving upward to reach, finally, what seemed to be the crest of the immense boulder pile, and to start down the other side.

NOW CAME the real panic. Beside this wild downward rush, the trip upward had been completely safe. Here was the sickening sensation of falling straight downward into nothingness. Several times, Greta was sure that Maggie had misjudged her leap and that she and the tiger were doomed to crash on the rocks hundreds of feet below. But each time, there was the soft breaking of the fall as the cat's huge pads gripped and held the ledges toward which she continually hurled her graceful body.

Then, the descent was over. The cats dropped into a level, rock-floored canyon and loped a quarter of a mile of its length before they turned abruptly through a narrow passage Greta would have overlooked entirely. Fifty yards of this and they trotted into a hidden paradise: a green gem of an oasis hidden in the heart of this vast rock pile. There was thick, lush grass—green, but of a much darker shade than that of Earth—and trees with dark graceful branches hanging into a crystal pool in which

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silver fish could be seen darting in and out among bright blue rocks below.

The two cats trotted straight to the pool and thrust their hot muzzles into the water—thus revealing to Greta that they had—in a sense—known where they were going. They'd smelled the water a long way off and had moved unerringly toward it.

Somewhat shaken by her experience, Greta dropped to the grass beside the pool and lay there, her head spinning, her heart thumping in her bosom. Maggie lapped at the water until she'd had her fill, then sat back on her haunches and yawned a great saber-toothed yawn. For a few moments, the Martian cat watched her mate who lay crouched over the edge of the pool striving to knock the silver fish out of the water with lightning-like-sweeps of his huge paw.

Mike had no success at this, and his temper began to shorten with each successive miss. His throaty growls echoed and reechoed among the rocks.

Maggie lost interest in this diversion and turned her attention to Greta. With a grin that opened her mouth and made her throat appear as a great pink tunnel, she padded over to the girl and sought to lick her cheek. Maggie's tongue would certainly have ripped Greta's face wide open had it found its mark. But Greta pushed the cat away with a sharp command to lie down.

Maggie sat back on her haunches and regarded Greta wistfully. Then, at some signal from Mike, Maggie turned away and the two cats trotted off side by side.

In panic now at the sudden loneliness, Greta called, "Maggie—Mike! Come back. Kitty—kitty—kitty! Come back, Maggie!"

BUT THE cats refused to obey, and Greta realized they had gone off looking for dinner. She stopped calling and lay back with her eyes closed. Her mind was now filled with thoughts and anxieties concerning Cort and Butch. A reaction of weakness seized her, and she realized how deep had been her shock at seeing Sam French cut down ruthlessly by the green fire. A sickness came to her at the memory, and she strove sternly for self-control.

How were Cort and Butch faring? she wondered. Were they still alive, or had they too been killed by the vicious flame guns? Biting her lip, she prayed fervently that they'd escaped, then tried deliberately to force away all thoughts of fear. Of course they'd escaped. Then, a thought came entirely unbidden to her mind. They had escaped, and she would yet feel Cort's strong arms around her—feel her body close to his.

She opened her eyes, leaned down over the edge of the pool and drank from its clear waters. As she got to her feet, the cool depths of the pool looked singularly inviting. She glanced quickly around the jewel-like park, then began stripping off her clothing. The thought of a plunge into the cool waters of the pond was more than Greta could resist.

But she was not to have that plunge immediately. As she dropped the last wispy bit of intimate apparel and stood there, a naked brown nymph, there came a transition that left her breathless.

First, the change of Pentarian day into night; an almost instantaneous darkening of the heavens, as the sun shot down below the horizon beyond the rocks. It was, she thought, as though a giant had drawn a black cape across the sky.

But this was not the only thing that filled her with wonder. Simultaneous with the coming of darkness, the pool became a thing of dazzling beauty.

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From its depths, there shot up a myriad of rainbow lights—every color from pale violet to deep orange, with the more fiery colors predominating, until the pool was transformed into a glowing fire pit.

There was no darkness. One form of light had been substituted for another. With the sun gone, the gorgeous phosphorescence from the pool lit up the park like a corner of fairyland.

Greta had just time to catch her breath in stunned surprise—overcome by the sheer beauty of the change. Then she saw something else—something so hideous that at first her eyes did not believe what they beheld.

She screamed and jumped—arms flung wide—into the multicolored waters of the pool.

"I WONDER what they're sore about?" Butch asked somewhat plaintively. "Here we are, not doing any harm, and they start trying to pot us. Is that Pentarian hospitality?"

The Pentarian space car, still without reenforcements, was continuing its dogged attack. It crossed over again, the forward gun spouting green fire. Cort pressed close to the hull of the Space Wagon as the flame sizzled by, and then threw two quick shots upward with his spectrum guns. He succeeded only in raising a pair of heat blisters on the thradium bottom of the car. "They're getting cagey," he growled. "It doesn't look as though we'll get any of them before help arrives."

A dark evil face peered downward as the car shot across. "Gad!" Butch muttered. "That guy Korbo's got a face to scare strong-hearted men. A puss right out of a grade-A nightmare. How you coming with that space car?"

They had dragged one of the portable cars into the shelter of the big ship, and between attacks, Cort was working grimly with the mechanism. "If they'll only give us a little more time. It's this damn jet connection. It's bent so we don't get a direct drive."

"Well, bend the thing back, damn it! That ought to be simple."

"This tube is four per cent thradium. Maybe you'd like a crack at it?"

Butch leaned forward, but Cort pushed him away and exerted strength against the bent tube until the veins stood out on his forehead. "I'm getting—it—now."

"For crisake lookout!"

Cort glanced upward and threw himself sideways just in time to avoid being smashed to bits by the green fire stream. But as the Pentarian ship passed over, he flung a defiant curse after it and went back to his work.

"I think I've got it," he said finally.

"It's about time," Butch grunted. "Let's get upstairs where we've got—Hey! What the hell! Who turned out the lights?"

Butch had been moving toward the space car in broad daylight. Only four short steps ago. But by the time he touched the rubber seat, he was in complete darkness. Thus came night on Pentar; like a dropoff into an inky pit.

"They don't seem to fuss around with twilight out here," Cort observed. "Come on! Roll your lard into this egg crate and let's get away. We can sneak underneath them and head for that rock pile over there. If Greta shows a light, we'll pick her up."

"And my cats, too."

"Never mind those damn tigers. There isn't room."

THE CAPSULE jet of the space car glowed brightly for a moment as the fuel caught. Then, the light car arose silently to glide away into the

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black sky. Cort crouched over the controls, while Butch rubbed his thick posterior where it had come in violent contact with the floor. He sat up gingerly and looked backward in the darkness. "Goodbye, Sam," he said softly. "It was nice knowing you."

"We'll chalk up a score for Sam before we're through," Cort said grimly. "We've got something else to do first."

Butch leaned over the bulging rubber side and stared downward into the darkness. "We ought to be pretty well over that rock pile now. And I don't see any lights."

"We know she's safe, anyhow. Nobody would bother her with those cats around. Looks as though we'll have to wait until daylight."

There was a moment of silence, then Butch's voice in which a note of uncertainty predominated: "Yeah. Oh, sure. She's safe with Maggie and Mike all right."

Cort's quick frown was hidden by the darkness. "You don't seem too confident. What's on your mind."

"Nothing. I was just thinking."

"Thinking what?"

"Those cats. They didn't get their supper."

"What in the devil's wrong with you? Haven't we got more important things to worry about than—"

"That could be pretty important."

"You mean—"

"I don't mean anything. That is—I'm not sure. They're as civilized as two Martian cats could be, and they like Greta. But they must be pretty hungry, and—"

"Great God, man!"

"I really don't think they'd get rough. But we'll keep our ears open, and be ready to go downstairs quick."

Cort gritted his teeth in frustration. "Damn this darkness—this helplessness. If those cats—"

Two beams of light cut through the darkness. They converged in a cross-fire on the motionless space car, catching Cort and Butch squarely in their merciless glare. A voice came out of the night—a sharp, cold voice: "Make a move, and you'll not live ten seconds."

"Hold on!" Cort yelled, and kicked at the controls. The car shot out into the darkness. But a mocking laugh drifted through the air, and a stream of green fire materialized in front of the car across the prow.

CORT SWERVED just in time to miss it, and just in time also to move within range of the search light beams which had followed the car's path unerringly. Again the laughter, and the voice: "It's no use. I suggest you stop this nonsense before I lose my temper and have you cut to pieces."

"How the hell do they stay on our tail that way?" Butch marveled.

"It's simple. They're spotting us in ultra-violet. We've probably been covered from the beginning." Then, in a louder voice: "All right. We don't seem to have much chance. Come on in."

"That's better."

There was a period of tense silence while the light beams shortened, converging on the helpless space car, and two more cars appeared in the circle of light sent out from their spots. They were cars of ancient design, but had been well cared-for and were in excellent shape.

One of them swung close, and a tall man posing in a garment that looked like a magician's cape, called out an order: "Settle to the ground immediately or we'll blast you!"

"We don't know what we're standing over," Cort objected. "It may be dangerous."

"Not as dangerous as remaining

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aloft. Drop down."

Cort lowered the car slowly until it settled on even ground some twenty feet below. The other two cars dropped to either side, and a squad of tall, hard-faced men came into range of the spot lights.

"That one barking the orders is Korbo," Butch said in a low voice. "He's the one Greta pointed out."

"Get ready to jump for it," Cort whispered. "When they ask for our guns, give it to them from the hip—then run."

But Korbo had a remarkable pair of ears, or he was an excellent judge of men. He snapped, "Drop your harnesses—and be careful about it. Touch those guns, and you'll never know what hit you."

Cursing under his breath, Cort did as he was ordered, and saw Butch's harness drop to the ground beside his own.

"That's better," Korbo approved.

AT THIS instant, the tall Pentarian was pushed casually aside by a small, sparrowlike individual with a jutting nose, a mustache, and an air of genial authority. He was rolling a long black cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, and he looked for all the world like a ward heeler from some large Earth city in the process of getting out the vote.

His voice was as hearty as his manner: "Well, now, if this isn't a pleasant surprise. A couple of boys from my old stamping ground! A couple of Earthmen for sure. How are things on the old ball of mud, anyhow?"

"Who the hell are you?" Butch asked bluntly.

The little man laughed. "Don't tell me you never heard of Boss Hagerty! Why, young feller, this is my territory out here. You're on Boss Hagerty's planet, son, and don't ever forget it. I'm the big wheel around here—the prize toad. I'm surprised, your not knowing that."

Hagerty pushed an open hand toward Cort, but the latter ignored it. "In that case, maybe you can answer a few questions," Cort said, making no attempt to keep the hostility from his voice.

Hagerty dropped his hand, but remained genial. "Sure thing, son. Ask away. Always like to put people straight."

"Why were we attacked by your ship without being given an opportunity to identify ourselves? Why was one of our men killed in cold blood by your murderers?"

"All a mistake, son. A big mistake. Sorry as hell it happened, but you got one of my boys, so that evens it up."

Butch's face went tight with rage. "Maybe that's what you think, shrimp, but—"

Boss Hagerty's smile remained warm and cordial as he motioned toward the closest uniformed underling. "You better give this lad the clouts," he laughed.

The tall soldier moved forward like a striking snake. His fist lashed out and Butch went sprawling to the ground. Cort leaped forward, but only to feel two of the deadly green-fire guns poked into his belly.

Little lines of mirth appeared at the corners of Hagerty's eyes. "Never did like to be called shrimp," he explained in a confidential voice. "I had to leave Earth on account of being called a name. A poll watcher on the West Side in Chicago accused me of being a crook, so I let him have it with a blackjack. I split his skull and he never woke up so I had to breeze. By the way, how are things in Chi these days?"

Butch was back on his feet, rubbing his jaw and eyeing the jaunty

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little man with a look of bewilderment and disbelief. Hagerty smiled at him, grasped his pudgy hand and shook it cordially. "You boys are like a breath of spring. No fooling. Sorry my gang took out after you, but as I said, it was just one of those things. You came in without identifying yourselves, so how were they to know?"

"We brought in a load of heavy salt on the Space Wagon, and we had a crackup," Cort said. "There was no chance to—"

Hagerty waved his cigar airily. "Yeah. I know all about that. Thanks a lot. The salt's been unloaded and it's on its way to Hagerty City now." His grin deepened and his chest bulged out. "Get that? I even got a town named after me. I wish the boys in Chi could know about it."

"They do," Cort retorted. "The whole solar system knows about Hagerty's Planet."

THE LITTLE man looked honestly startled, then grinned from ear to ear. "No fooling! Well what do you know about that!" He looked as though he'd just been presented with a token of all mankind's admiration, and Cort marveled. If this cocky little upstart's pleasure was not genuine, then he was an amazingly good actor.

"Of course, I had to have some ability," Hagerty said confidentially, "but I got the breaks, too. This oversized ping pong ball was ripe to be knocked over. I passed up nine worlds after I ran out on that rap in Chicago, and finally stumbled on this place. Lots of plain luck involved."

Butch had been staring at Boss Hagerty with his mouth hanging open. Slowly, the bewildered man turned his eyes on Cort. "Is this guy for real?" he muttered.

Hagerty's happy smile did not change, but Cort saw his hand start to move as though to order another helping of the clouts for Butch.

In order to forestall this, Cort spoke swiftly concerning the first thing that came to his mind. "Hagerty—that's an Irish name. But you don't appear to be Irish."

Hagerty's mind was diverted. He grinned even deeper and set his teeth into the cigar. "I ain't," he admitted. "I'm a mongrel. A mixture of eighteen different breeds. That's where I get my ability. Now, a thoroughbred ain't got what I got, son. It takes a mongrel to step out and be at home in any company."

"I'm sure it does, and no doubt you've done very well for yourself, but—"

Hagerty turned now and waved a casual hand toward Korbo who had been sulking back in the shadows. "Forgot to introduce you to my Number One boy—Korbo here. Step up, Mac, and meet two boys from Earth."

Korbo came forward. He obeyed Hagerty's order swiftly, but made no effort to hide the sullenness and resentment in his face. Hagerty regarded him affectionately, slapped him on the arm and said, "I found Mac had a lot of hidden talents that only wanted developing. I picked him up and trained him, and now he's my hatchetman—my bully boy. Does all the dirty work and likes it. He's some punkins now, and he owes it all to me. Don't you, Mac?"

The evil-eyed Pentarian answered up promptly, "Yes, Master. I owe it all to you."

Hagerty grinned confidentially at Cort and made a deprecating gesture. "That Master stuff—it's their own idea. I tried to discourage it, but what can you do?" He shrugged expressively. "It comes of their own free will and from genuine love, so I let it pass."

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CORT OPENED his mouth to comment, but the mercurial mind of Boss Hagerty had leap-frogged to another subject, and his tongue was quicker. "By the way—the boys told me you got a menagerie with you. From the way they talked, it sounded like a couple of Martian cats. They had some wild story about a girl riding one of them up into the rocks. Kind of sounds like my boy's have been smoking the wrong weed—right?"

Cort had to make a swift decision. He made it and said, "You're right—the wrong weed."

Boss Hagerty seemed disappointed. "Then that little black-headed gal didn't come back with you, eh? I was kind of hoping she would. These Pentarian females are pretty unappetizing. Either big as horses and just as ugly —" he nodded toward the tall, silent squadron "—or short and squat and hairless as cucumbers. There's only two kinds out here."

To Cort, this seemed an opportune time to press a possible advantage. He said, "No, she didn't come. But she told us about the agreement Korbo made concerning her father and one more load of salt. So we brought the ransom, and of course you'll produce John Lansing."

Hagerty rocked back on his heels, squinted speculatively at a spot over Cort's head, and said, "Boy, you make it sound pretty tough talking about ransom that way. You make old Boss Hagerty sound like a hard article. But if you knew how bad we needed that salt..."

"I'm not criticizing," Cort replied. "I'm just establishing my identity, proving I'm an authorized agent for Greta Lansing."

"Uh-huh." Hagerty drew deeply on his cigar. "Nice name that—Greta Lansing. Sure wish she'd of come along with you. Wish I could turn her dad over to you, too, but I can't do it. The damned old fool ran away."

"Ran away—"

"That's what I said. Had him bedded down all nice and comfy out on one of Korbo's farms, and he didn't appreciate the hospitality. Maybe he'll turn up, though. Let's hope so."

Hagerty turned abruptly back toward the space car in which he'd ridden. He motioned toward Cort and Butch with a jerk of his head. "But let's not stand here gassing all night. Me—I got a little lake resort up in them rocks—a place I come to relax when the affairs of state get heavy. You boys might as well come along and get something to eat. Then we'll talk a few things over. Believe it or not, I could use a couple of able bodied brains to help run this cockeyed little world of mine. We'll talk it over." He beckoned with his cigar. "Come on and ride with me. Korbo'll see to bringing your crate along." As he waited, Hagerty ran a speculative eye over the trim Earth car. "Nice little boat. Glad we didn't have to cut it up."

CORT'S EMOTIONS were mixed as he sat beside the silent Butch in Hagerty's car. The pilot had never run into anything like Hagerty, and he was somewhat at a loss. Finding the little opportunist far out here on Pentar, was like tripping over a Venusian monkeyman entering the Biltmore in white tie and tails; a trifle out of place, to say the least.

But Cort was content to give Hagerty only half his mind. The rest was occupied with wondering about Greta. His instinct had told him to lie about her presence on Pentar, and Hagerty's subsequent remarks had proven his instinct correct. But there was the problem of where Greta had gone, how he was going to contact her, and how they were going to find her

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father and quit the planet. Possibly the Space Wagon would limp back to the solar system, but if so, how were they going to get their hands on it? Cort did not even hope that Boss Hagerty would set them off with his blessing. He knew that so far as Hagerty was concerned, they were on Pentar for the balance of their lives. The only question was how long those lives would be.

Conundrums of this sort were threshing through Cort's mind when he caught sight of the strange glow off in the darness. He watched this brighten and increase in size and intensity as the ship swept toward it. Now, the multi-colored lights of the display deepened and took on movements like some warm aurora borealis, or a tremendous display of fire works.

Then, the ships breasted a dark ridge, and there lay below them a small, cuplike park drenched with various and beautiful shades of coloring which seemed to emanate from a gigantic fire in its center.

Boss Hagerty chuckled, taking personal satisfaction from the amazement of the two men. "A little place I ran onto," he said modestly. "There's something funny in the lake down there; some kind of phosphorus. It lights up the whole layout like a Christmas tree on Broadway. The pond is right for swimming, and there's grass and trees and everything. You'll really go for it."

The space cars settled noiselessly upon the thick sod of the lawn, and Hagerty led the way to the flaming lake. "The boys'll bring the grub from the cars," he stated, "and we'll have ourselves a spread. A few drinks won't go bad, either—"

Hagerty stopped talking abruptly as his eyes followed those of Butch who was staring at something on the bank of the pond. Cort also was looking down in tense silence. He glanced swiftly at Butch as Boss Hagerty stepped forward and bent over.

"Hmmm," Hagerty muttered, "what have we here now? As I live and breath! A pair of panties—girl's panties—and a brassiere and stockings for a pair of nice long legs. All the rest of it, too. Everything a girl'd wear, but no babe to fill 'em. What do you know about that?"

He turned to Cort and Butch. There was a smile on his face; a smile of hurt sensibilities; the look of a man who had been treated badly. When he spoke, his voice was gently reproachful. He said, "Boys, you'd better give these two chaps the treatment. I'm afraid they've got some lumps coming on account of they tried to bamfoozle old Hagerty. Telling him that black-haired armful was way back on Earth, when she's really wandering around here somewhere as naked as a jay-bird. Yeah, these sons've got some lumps coming."

Butch went down with a moan from a swift murderous blow from the closest Pentarian. Cort was more alert. He stepped inside of the first blow aimed at him and sank his fist up to the wrist on an untightened belly. This brought a jaw down within reach. He hit the jaw and almost tore the attached head off. This being no time for sportsmanship, he kicked the next comer in the groin with enough force to numb his own foot. The man screamed and doubled up. Cort's knee smashed his nose into a blood-spouting pulp, and there were two down.

But there were too many to go, and Cort was swiftly smothered under an avalanche of murderous blows. His whole body became the home of various and agonizing pains.

Then, as he went down and out, he heard Boss Hagerty's softly complaining voice: "Can you imagine

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them trying to get cozy with a good guy like me?"

MAGGIE HAD grown exceedingly fond of the dark slim she-human—almost as much so as of the fat, greasy he-human she had learned to know as her master. Mike, however, was her true lord, and allegiance to him came first. He was pretty much neutral so far as all humans were concerned. He'd learned not to eat the ones he knew intimately—at least, he had never been hungry enough in their presence to give it serious thought—and he somewhat grudgingly obeyed the commands of the fat he who provided nourishment at the proper times. Also, he had nothing against the dark she for whom his silly mate had formed such an attachment. But he would put up with no foolishness, so after the dark she-human had been brought to the water, he signalled Maggie that it was time to forage for food.

Both cats were thoroughly aware of the many humans hiding in the neighborhood of the clear water. The humans had not been seen, even by the sharp eyes of the Martian tigers, but the scent was so heavy, the cats could have run without hesitation from one hiding place to the next.

Probably a pair of lazy cats would have dined sumptuously without traveling more than ten steps, but Maggie and Mike were not lazy, and were willing to exert a little effort in order to find non-human food.

Side by side, their twelve legs moving in almost perfect rhythm, they went up the rocky slopes as they had come until the faint scent of meat was registered in Mike's sharp nostrils. He swung to the right, Maggie still dutifully by his side, and lunged straight toward a peculiar red bush, the like of which he'd never seen. One sweep of his huge right front paw tore the bush up by the roots and revealed a small, terrorized rodent with a heavy musky odor.

Mike slapped a paw down on the creature and had the annoyance of feeling the fragment of meat stick between two of his toes. He growled and pried it out with the end of his two-foot right fang. This operation completed, there was not enough left to eat, so he pushed the dead rodent contemptuously toward Maggie. Maggie licked it up daintily with her great platter of a tongue and got the morsel caught most unfortunately between two of her teeth.

Maggie snarled her frustration, and the two cats loped on through the rocks, entering into a telepathic agreement to waste no more time on tidbits too small to chew on.

Larger game, however, was so scarce as to be practically nonexistent. Beyond the rocks, they came upon some sort of a desert serpent. It was many yards long and was viciously fanged. Upon sight of Mike and Maggie, it coiled itself into a scaly heap, reared its head high, and prepared to meet any attack.

INSTINCTIVELY, the cats knew a bite from this reptile would mean certain death. Nonetheless, they went after it with cunning and dispatch. Putting themselves at opposite points of a circle, they danced daintily around the hideous snake until bewilderment shone in its cruel little eyes. In so doing, they were in a position so that the snake could face but one of them. It chose Mike, so Maggie, at just the right moment, leaped in with the speed of black and orange light to smash the flat bone of the creature's skull.

They sat down then, side by side on their haunches, and watched the thing thresh violently in its death struggle. When the worst was over,

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they stretched the long body out and squatted down to dinner.

But again they were confounded. This reptile was composed entirely of rubber, or some other material equally as resistant and unappetizing. For a long time, they ground down patiently upon the snake carcass—gnawed until their massive jaws were aching from weariness. And, yet, they had hardly made an abrasion on the scaly surface.

They gave up simultaneously and in complete disgust. Raging at the time wasted, Mike went into a snarling frenzy and began clawing a great hole in the ground. The hole large enough to suit him, he pushed the snake therein and clawed fresh earth over it until it was completely buried. Somewhat mollified by this vengeance, but still mighty hungry, the two cats went off again at a tireless lope.

Some ten miles away, they spent a good ten minutes carefully stalking a gigantic bird that promised much nourishment. But the foul awakened at the crucial moment and plunged with a terrified scream into the air. Mike lunged upward after it, describing a great arc that was forty feet from the ground at its highest point. He came down with a mouthful of feathers and a rage burning as fiercely as a blast furnace.

Maybe they could have done very well on Mars, but on Pentar, it seemed, Mike and Maggie were complete busts as hunters.

It was now that Mike began wondering what he was doing out here in the desert. Why waste time in this fashion when he knew a place where the human-smell was so heavy, it made one drool? Without further thought, he reversed his route and went back as he had come, the ever-faithful Maggie by his side.

As they went up the outside of the immense rockpile, night descended upon Pentar in the twinkling of an eye. But the cats gave no thought whatever to this phenomena. They were not concerned in the least as to how night either came or went. It did not inconvenience them one iota, because they could see equally well at midnight or high noon.

BUT THEY were annoyed a great deal when they discovered a change in conditions at the now brilliantly-lighted park. Only a short time ago, the human-smell had been heavy enough to bite. Now it was faint, telling them the humans had gone elsewhere. In a rage now, from gnawing hunger, they began to work independently, sniffing c a r e f u l l y through the smell-trails, trying to unravel at least one and follow it wherever it might lead.

But again and again the trails led them up against solid rock at the far end of the park. Again and again they started over, only to be brought up repeatedly against the same hard barrier, until finally Mike hurled himself, raging, at the perpendicular cliff and got knocked backward thirty feet for his pains.

He returned again to the wall, to find Maggie sniffing at a small opening the weight of his huge body had caused to occur. Mike pushed her roughly aside, applied his own nose to the opening, and was rewarded by a human-smell so rich as to make his jowls quiver.

While Maggie snarled with impatience, Mike attacked the opening with fang and claw. His great saber tusks drew sparks from the rocks, and his ten-inch claws jerked out boulders by the roots. Gradually, the opening increased until Mike could force his body through it without losing too much skin. Maggie followed behind him, her six legs straining to force the rest of her along under the

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low ledge that continued inward while the human-smell increased to such a point as to be almost palatable.

After a seemingly endless trip with the roof forcing them to scrape their bellies continuously against the stone floor, the cats came at last to a place where they looked down into a sizeable room from a place just under the ceiling.

At the far end of the room, two great flares burned mournfully from clefts in the rocks, throwing great dancing shadows on the walls. Between the flares were a series of stone steps leading up to what was obviously an altar. Before this altar stood a a squat, ugly, naked man who was obviously engaged in some act of worship. He was holding aloft in both hands a great swatch of what both cats knew to be long, black hair.

As a matter of fact, the hair made Maggie stir with a sudden sense of undefinable disloyalty. It made Mike remember the black haired she-human —remember her with gustatory relish and with longing.

But their main attention was centered upon the man. They knew nothing of altars, of worship or of strange sacrifices. They knew only one thing. Here at last was supper.

And about time, too.

GRETA, when standing unclothed there by the fabulous fire-pool, had been completely occupied by the rapturous riot of color. Her ears were oblivious of even ordinary sounds, so she certainly did not hear the stealthy approach of softly whispering feet.

The horror of it hit her in one sickening second when, from the corner of her eye, she caught movement and turned her head to see the ugly, entirely hairless little man creeping silently toward her.

And he was only one of many. Seemingly materialized from vapor, they were all around her, crouching, waiting, leering in lasivious eagerness at her perfect body.

Greta screamed and leaped into the center of the pool as the little man jumped toward her with arms spread wide. She sank down into the stillness of the waters, and immediately all was calm and restful. There in the heart of the flaming pond, she thought it must indeed have been a hallucination.

But a rough hand was entwined in her hair and she was dragged to the surface. It was no dream. It had been stark reality, and she was being hauled ashore by a grinning little monster, while dozens of the creatures danced about on the shore and chanted some foul gibberish Greta couldn't understand.

The girl fought valiantly, but it availed her nothing. The man was entirely at home in the water, and there were countless willing hands waiting to drag Greta, in her nakedness and shame, to the pond bank.

Four of the creatures grasped her in such a way as to render her completely helpless. She could only writhe like some beautiful mermaid brought from the deep onto dry land.

It was then that she heard—or thought she heard—a few starkly Earthian words salted into the gibberish. She could have sworn one of the creatures howled: "Some dame! Some dame." That another mouthed a familiar phrase: "I'll be double-damned." But Greta had a feeling the words meant little to the speakers.

In desperation, she added her own voice to the din: "Please! Please let me go! At least, let me have my clothes! Why do you treat me this way?"

The captors paid no attention to their prisoner's pleadings. They continued to howl in glee, and Greta noted that several kept glancing fearfully up toward the sky and urging

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The hungry tigers knew nothing of alters, of worship or of strange sacrifices. They knew only one thing--here at last in the shape of this little man was their supper

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the others on a course toward the far end of the park. The movement in that direction became a procession with Greta's bearers leading the way and the rest of the obscene little creatures following close behind.

THE GIRL was carried directly to the face of a perpendicular wall and wondered, in panic, if they intended to dash her brains out against its stone surface. But once there, a group of them flung their combined weight against the wall and a totally invisible door swung slowly open.

This revealed a flare-lit passage leading straight into the cliff. Carrying Greta triumphantly, holding her high over their heads, Greta's captors led the babbling procession down the corridor and into a vast room carved out of solid rock.

In the center of this room was a raised block into which light chains were bolted. These chains were attached to anklets with which the little men speedily imprisoned Greta as on an auction block, where every eye in the place could feast upon her beauty.

The girl stood there with her head hanging in utter shame, discouragement and hopelessness. She had come to the end. Of her exact fate, she was ignorant, but now it mattered little. She hoped it would be quick death of some sort. That at least was perferable to torture, or her becoming the feature of some ghastly act of obscenity with thousands of lustful eyes witnessing her final degradation.

The assembled savages were in no hurry to proceed with the program, whatever it was to be. They kept up the weird, mournful chant they had begun by the pool, and were now forming a snake dance about the stone platform as they pressed in closer and closer to their lovely captive. As the line swayed in an uneven circle, some of them grew bolder and darted in to pass their hands, almost in reverence, through Greta's long, shining hair.

Then, one facet of this nightmare dawned on the girl. These people were entirely hairless. Not so much as the finest down was visible upon their shiny bullet heads and squat bodies. And their actions indicated it was Greta's hair that attracted them, sent them into this ecstatic frenzy.

The stricken girl shuddered as she felt the hands brushing against the hair that swept in glory down her back and touched her shapely ankles. She had been standing with head bowed and eyes closed. Now, she opened her eyes to see the ugly face of a wizened little female grimacing up at her. The woman's lips moved to reveal twisted teeth. Her voice was a croak, but was intelligible: "I talk—like you," the woman said.

"Then help me—please help me."

"I listen to Boss—to Boss Hagerty. I learn. You talk like him. I talk like him."

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"What do you want with me?"

The woman frowned importantly. "Hair. If gods want—we give you to gods—with knife."

"How—do you find out if the gods want me?"

"The god-man. He find out. He take that." The woman pointed to Greta's hair. "He go in to gods. Ask them. Over there."

She pointed to a closed stone panel before which, even now, a wizened little man was kneeling. A man who had taken no part in the frenzy, but had remained alone in his meditations.

AT THIS POINT, he arose, turned and approached the platform. Instantly, all activity stopped and he passed among the still creatures to mount the stone beside Greta. She could see him closely now, and noted his eyes seemed unseeing, but were filled with an odd ecstasy of their own; an entranced look as though he communed with unseen forces. From a thin belt around his waist—his sole stitch of wearing apparel—he took a short-bladed knife and grasped Greta's hair at the nape of her neck. With a few swift strokes, he cut it completely away.

A soft cry went up from the watching throngs, as though this act had given them some sort of emotional release.

Ignoring everyone, the man went down from the platform carrying the hair in both hands as one would carry an offering. He walked straight to the door from whence he'd come, and now it had been opened by men inching along on their knees. Evidently it was a holy door before which no man stood erect.

The bearer of Greta's raven locks went inside, after which the door was closed again.

Now, everyone waited in silence. The mood had changed into one of silent respect, almost of gloom, and Greta whispered to the crone who was still at her feet, "And what if the gods don't want me?"

The woman shrugged. "Then some man take you. The strongest man," she added, as she got up and wandered away.

The dead silence was oppressing. The tension of waiting unbearable to the terrified girl. Why didn't they get it over with? Why did they torture her with this ghastly waiting? Why didn't the gods decide one way or another?

Then it seemed the gods were displeased because, from beyond the stone door, there came sounds of savage distemper; sounds that petrified the hairless people who made it obvious this was something entirely new; sounds their gods had never made before.

But to Greta, they were easily identifiable. She had heard them before and, in a flash, came understanding. Somehow, Maggie and Mike had come back from hunting and found their way into the place beyond that door. And they had not fared well on their hunting trip, because the savage roars and snarls were those of famished Martian tigers. No other sound in all creation was quite so blood-chilling and hideous.

With this new knowledge, there came to Greta a fantastic plan for her own salvation. A plan which, if it succeeded, would do so because of its very audacity.

REACHING down, she snapped the anklets from her legs and held out her arms for attention. "Listen to me—all of you. I have tolerated this out of curiosity, but now I grow weary of it. I am a goddess. The Goddess Greta, far stronger than your own gods to which you pray."

She waited until the few who un-

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derstood her translated the words into the jargon these people used. As a muttering of anger went up, she continued, "Far stronger than your gods, and I have come to rule over you. As proof of my power, I have caused your priest to be destroyed, as he prayed to your weak gods and they were powerless to protect him. Even now he has disappeared, and two of my creatures occupy your sacred room. Throw open the door and let them out, or I will smash it to bits with my magic! Throw it open, I say!"

When the meaning reached the kneeling men, they went into a hurried and fearful conference, after which they crawled forward on their knees and drew back the panel.

Greta called out with far more confidence than she felt: "Maggie! Mike! Come out here. Come to me this minute."

In the doorway stood the two great Martian tigers. Well fed and only lazily interested. Maggie was purring out her satisfaction over a full stomach. She opened her mouth and grinned a great grin at all who cared to look. Then, recognizing Greta, mainly from scent, the cat trotted toward the platform.

Mike stood motionless for a few moments. Then, because he had nothing better to do, he followed his mate to sit back on his haunches beside her and in front of Greta.

"Look in your sacred room, I say," Greta called out. "See if your holy man has not vanished."

A few of the braver ones complied, to come forth almost immediately and fall on their faces in terror at this new goddess and her terrible creatures. Soon, every face in the room except those of Greta, Maggie, and Mike, were pressed to the floor.

"Bring me my clothes by the pool," Greta commanded, and many of the people hastened to obey.

The girl sighed deeply in sudden relief. She had won through—turned defeat to victory in a few brief moments.

Maybe I lost my shirt, she told herself, but I certainly ended up the top goddess of this outfit!

BUT CORT and Butch had not fared nearly so well as their lovely and quick-thinking companion of the space voyage. After the episode at the flame pool, there was a long nightmare-time of unconsciousness and half-consciousness resulting from the vicious, cold-blooded attack of Boss Hagerty's muscle men.

When Cort came to, his first impression was of a terrible odor; a fetid reek that violated his nostrils and brought him to the point of retching.

He opened his eyes to a dim half-light and made out the still form of Butch lying beside him on a dirt floor. He nudged him and was rewarded by a stirring of the fat body. Cort said, "Wake up, Lard. Looks like somebody brought us home."

"Don't call me Lard," Butch muttered, then groaned as he sought to struggle erect. "Good lord! What the hell happened?"

"We got worked over. Boss Hagerty's boys—remember?"

"Remember? My shoulder. My leg. I think they're both busted."

"We're probably lucky to be alive. I wonder if they got Greta?"

"Not unless they got Mike and Maggie too."

"But what could have happened to her? Her clothes were lying on the bank of that pond."

Butch had come to a sitting position. He was gingerly patting an egg-sized lump under his right ear. "Say—that pool was the damndest thing I

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ever saw."

"God knows how they got there."

"Either someone stripped her—and I don't think they did because the clothes were in too neat a pile—or she went for a swim."

"And didn't come up again?"

"Could be. Maybe there was something funny about that water hole. Maybe Greta was drowned."

Cort had been holding his head in his hands. He raised his head and there was frustration—misery—in the one eye which was still open. The other eye showed nothing but a large purple swelling. "We've got to find out! I've got to know!"

"Well," Butch filled in with more cheer, "we know it wasn't Maggie or Mike. When they eat people, they don't stop to undress them. Their dinner goes down shoes and all." Butch frowned and turned somber. "What I'd like to know is where those cats went."

"What I'd like to know is where the hell we are."

Cort got to his feet and began examining the place. He found it to be about ten feet square and built of solid stone. The ceiling, also of rock, was about ten feet up, and only one small window aired the foul place. There were no furnishings; nothing to sit on except a boulder in one corner.

BUTCH STRUGGLED to his feet, swayed dizzily and staggered to the boulder. He sat down on it and groaned anew. "Wherever this trap is, I hope we aren't in it for good. Maybe they plan to leave us here. Then we'd starve!"

"It doesn't seem logical," Cort said, "but maybe—"

His words were broken off by a startled yelp from Butch, and Cort turned to see the fat man sprawled on the dirt floor. "That damn rock," Butch yelled. "It moved!"

As the two men stared, the boulder sifted in its setting, and one edge of it lifted a few inches. From the crack underneath, caused by this lifting, there came a harsh whisper: "Give me a hand, will you?"

Both men jumped to comply. By exerting their joint efforts against one side of the boulder, they were able to lift it high enough so that a thin, almost naked creature found clearance and slithered from beneath it. "Thanks," the creature said. "I couldn't have made it alone."

The man was completely exhausted from his efforts. He dropped to the floor and sat propped half-erect against the wall of the prison. Both Butch and Cort stared at him, and for a few moments they were both speechless.

The man looked ready to expire from malnutrition and abuse. He had once been a big man, but now he was little more than bones and a hideously mottled skin. His beard was thick and matted and would have made an excellent home for a nest of mice, if indeed the mice had not already taken up residence. His eyes were watery and red rimmed but, in spite of all this, he managed a weak smile.

"Welcome to the Vanderbilt, boys. The room service leaves something to be desired, but you'll get used to it. Who are you, and where did you come from?"

"Who the hell are you?" Butch retorted.

The man laughed weakly. "The name is John Lansing—or at least that's what it was. I don't recognize myself any more, but that's who I was. John Lansing—gentleman at large—space adventurer—pilot second to none—nonconformist in all things except good liquor. You wouldn't happen to have a flask in your pocket, would you?"

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"Greta's old man!" Butch mouthed in wonder.

THE WORDS brought a rapid change in the man. He came to his feet and leaped toward Cort who was nearest him. "What was that? Greta! My daughter! You know her? She came back to this accursed planet? Speak, damn it! Tell me!"

Cort took Lansing by his scrawny arms and eased him down on the boulder. "Take it easy, mister. You're about done in. I'll tell you all about it."

"Then tell me. What're you waiting for?"

"My name is Liggett—Cort Liggett. This is Xerxes Mecropoulis, called Butch. Your daughter contacted me on Mars and talked me into bringing a load of heavy salt to Pentar which was to be used to get you free."

The old man groaned. "The little fool! She should have known Hagerty wouldn't keep his word. He'll take her and— Where is she now? What happened to her?"

"We don't know. Korbo attacked us after we made a crash landing and it looked bad—"

"So I put her on a tiger and sent her into some rocks," Butch chimed in.

Lansing's eyes narrowed. He tightened visibly. Then wilted and mirrored utter defeat. When he spoke, it was to no one in particular—merely a statement of complete frustration: "I'd had a little hope up to now. It's amazing how long hope lives. How it refuses to die." He raised his eyes to Cort. "When they brought you in, I thought maybe this was it—the break. But I should have known by looking at you. Two men beaten silly by Hagerty's bully boys. What else could I expect, really."

"You're all wrong, old timer," Butch said. "We got our lumps, but we aren't nuts. You see, I own a couple of Martian cats which we brought along. They're house broken to a certain extent. Wouldn't eat humans or anything like that—"

"You mean those six-legged monstrosities from the Martian hills?"

"That's right."

"How do you know they wouldn't eat a human? No one ever tamed a Martian tiger."

Cort held up a hand. "This is getting us nowhere," he said sharply. "The situation is this, Lansing. Hagerty and his men took us and we went to a strange lake that seemed to be full of fire—"

"The Flame Pool," Lansing said impatiently. "Hagerty uses it for outings, and there's something else there, too. But go on."

"Greta must have been there before us, because we found her clothes on the bank, as though she'd gone in for a swim. But that's all. Greta wasn't there, nor were the cats."

"Then we got our lumps and landed in this brig," Butch said.

"So, while we don't know where Greta is, we know Hagerty or Korbo didn't have her—at least not at that time."

"You said there was something else at that pool," Butch cut in. "What did you mean?"

"The Hairless Ones. They have an outlet at the pool—a temple."

"There's an awful lot about this planet we don't know," Butch retorted. "Maybe you'd better brief us."

"Give it from the beginning. If anything's to be done, we've got to have some idea of the score."

"It's Hagerty," Lansing said, "all Hagerty. You see, from time immemorial, this has been a planet of warfare between the Big Ones and the Hairless Ones, with the latter staying pretty much in the saddle. They've

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killed each other and lived only to fight and die, but neither side ever won a victory of annihilation. But neither side developed, either. They had no time for research and education, what with the rigors of staying alive. It was just a backward planet where death was the nature of things.

"Then Hagerty came along. This rotten little opportunist from Earth was running away from a murder charge, when he came to Pentar and sensed his opportunity. He's a genius of sorts, and with his political experience, he checked the situation and threw in with the Big Ones. Took them over, rather, and showed them how to hammer the Hairless Ones into submission. On the strength of this, he took over the planet for himself—"

CORT FROWNED and broke in: "You said they are backward here. Yet, we were attacked by men in space cars—"

"The cars—the guns—everything modern, was imported from other worlds by Hagerty. Now, he's started manufacturing on a slave labor basis, using the Hairless Ones as slaves. That's why the heavy salt is so important to him. It's needed in his manufacturing plants. They can hardly function without it."

"Quite a boy, this Hagerty," Butch commented.

"Also utterly dishonest and entirely ruthless."

"So we've discovered—especially the ruthless part."

"Another thing he lacks here on Pentar is desirable women. The females here leave much to be desired. He overcame this by importing—kidnapping—girls from Earth and Venus. But there were two drawbacks to this: Those he procured were worn out and destroyed quickly by the insatiable lust of the Big Ones, and Hagerty is smart enough to know he can't go out for kidnapping in a big way. The solar planets let him alone because he's so far away, but they could come out and smash him if the stench got too strong. So he sits here on his world and yearns for beautiful women."

"Like Greta," Butch said, and drew a scowl from Cort.

"Keep your big trap shut!"

But Lansing reacted only through weariness. "It's all right. Indignation is a luxury for which I no longer have the strength. One becomes realistic in a place like this. Yes—beautiful girls like Greta."

"You haven't told us where we are."

"In Korbo's Processing Plant Number Two. We grind rock here for the new roads Hagerty is building."

"You said Hagerty helped the Big Ones beat the Hairless Ones. Are they completely subjugated?"

"Not entirely as yet, but it's only a question of time. They've gone underground where they're hard to get at, but Korbo corralled plenty of them. They're held in captivity and fed into the factories where they are systematically killed from starvation and over-work. It's a calculated process of eliminating the race."

"You're working in this factory also?"

"Yes, and you two are here for that purpose too, no doubt. We'll die faster than normal because we have the hatred of the Hairless Ones to contend with. We're of Hagerty's race, and it's a little like being in a prison where the other convicts are down on you—only here it's worse. The Hairless Ones have more talent for slow torture than any prison full of convicts."

John Lansing got up from the boulder. "I've got to go back now. The other end of this tunnel leads through my cell, and they mustn't find out I'm

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gone. My two-hour rest period is about over, so I'll probably see you in the factory. Will you help me with this stone?"

They raised the boulder, and John Lansing left as he had come. "Buck up, old pal," Butch said in parting. "Things'll work out. Anybody figures they're going to cut my rations better think again."

Lansing vanished into the tunnel. The stone was dropped back into place and the two men sat staring at the wall.

"Well," Butch sighed. "At least we know the score."

"That we do. Now, I'm wondering what happened to Greta."

HER COUP having succeeded, Greta realized the time had come for some good constructive thinking and planning. She sat on the stone platform decently clothed again and with her back against Maggie's satiny shoulder.

Around her, the Hairless Ones continued to remain as they were, faces pressed to the floor. Greta, working from minute to minute, sensed an opportunity here to completely grasp the reins of the situation. It seemed the next logical step. But, with the time for decision and action having arrived, she found it wasn't so easy. She was ready to do something, but what?

With these thoughts mulling through her mind, she noted the complete passivity of the Hairless Ones. Were they trying to graft their noses to the floor? Why didn't they get up and go about their business?

Then, she realized they were waiting for her. They were hers, but she didn't know what to do with them. At least, she told herself, she could have a little privacy. With this in mind, she got to her feet, assumed the stance she felt a goddess would assume, and pointed imperiously toward the exit door. "Go!" She commanded. "Get hence! Scram! Beat it! Your goddess would be alone."

That sounds silly, she thought to herself. But evidently it did not sound so to the Hairless Ones because, after the necessary translations were made, they began crawling toward the door. This manner of exit interested Maggie a great deal. She snapped her tail and snarled her appreciation of the grotesque exodus. And her snarls helped speed it up, until not a Hairless One remained in the room.

Alone now with the cats, Greta did some heavy thinking. She yearned above all for knowledge of what had happened to Cort and Butch. Had they been killed by the green fire at the space ship? Probably they had, she thought, and the sickness in her heart brought tears welling up. Maggie regarded the girl with quick sympathy, turned and growled at Mike who was taking a nap. Mike woke, growled and whipped his tail.

But I'm not certain they're dead, Greta thought. Maybe, somehow, they survived. I've got to know. I've got to find out. The only answer was to quit the hidden paradise and return to the space ship.

NOW, HER thinking having grown more facile, other aspects of the picture came to her. She felt, even if vaguely, that her hold over the Hairless Ones could be of great value. Therefore, it was something to be preserved. And, with the appetites of Mike and Maggie to be considered, her goddessship could come conceivably into jeopardy. She felt the Hairless Ones would not too long worship a goddess whose two creatures made a practice of devouring them.

Therefore, Greta told herself grimly, the cats' menus must be augmented elsewhere. Eat they would. That was a definite fact, and Greta was sur-

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prised that she did not quaver at the thought of their eating Hagerty's allies, the Tall Ones. After all, this was no tea party. This was a deadly earnest game—survival of the fittest. It was no time to be queezy about the laws of nature relative to Martian tigers.

Having thought it all out carefully, Greta got to her feet and snapped her fingers at the cats. "Come on, babies," she said. "It's time to leave here."

Maggie was eager to go. Mike didn't think so much of the idea, but he complied grudgingly. At the exit door, Greta, having developed a dormant sense of the dramatic, climbed on Maggie, got a good hold, and called: "Open for your goddess. Your goddess would leave this foul bug's nest."

The door opened promptly and Greta gave sharp orders to the cats as she heard Butch do. The response left nothing to be desired. The magnificent Martian tigers went from the room like two orange meteors; out across the green park, knocking the Hairless Ones about like straws in the wind. Up the rocky slope sailed the goddess, triumphantly calm on the back of her tawny mount.

As she reached the high ridge, Greta looked back and smiled. "That," she told the cats, "should give those pigmies something to talk about in the corner tavern."

It was surprising to the girl how a little practice had given her skill in holding her seat on Maggie. Where it had been a perilous chore, it was now an exhilarating experience. She heard herself crying "Faster! Faster!" into the singing wind. She laughed as the great cats dropped seventy-five feet through space to land on a ledge not two feet wide.

Below her now was the comparatively flat floor of the desert and, two miles away, the apparently deserted space ship. Greta edged Maggie in that direction by pulling hard on the cat's right ear, and in no time at all they came to a halt at the foot of the ramp leading to the open passageway door.

The ramp had not been there previously. Evidently, Hagerty and his Tall Ones had looted the ship; had probably taken the cargo of heavy salt to their factories.

GRETA DISMOUNTED and climbed the ramp. All was silence. She peered into the ship and saw a single light burning in the passageway. Sick with fear at the thought of coming upon the dead bodies of Cort and Butch, she moved forward. Down the passageway toward the pilot room. The door was closed. She opened it—and found herself staring up at a Tall One—evidently a guard left at the ship by Korbo or Boss Hagerty.

The man blinked, unable at first to realize his good fortune. An Earth woman. A creature beyond his wildest dreams standing before him. An Earth woman to be stripped and used without interference by anyone. For this privilege, any Tall One would gladly face death afterward.

He reached for Greta, and it was only by a miracle that she escaped him and was able to turn and flee. She got to the door and through it. On the ramp she tripped, and fell headlong, with the sound of the lustful Tall One sharp in her ears.

"Maggie!" she screamed. "Maggie! Mike!"

Then came pure horror. Two orange streaks sailed through the air—two silent juggernauts of death. The last thing the Tall One saw in this life was a pair of open maws and two double rows of glistening teeth. He screamed once. Then he was dead.

Nearby, Greta rolled over and bur-

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fed her head in her arms. She clamped hands over her ears, seeking to exclude the awful sounds that filled the air. Rank sickness flared through her body, and to dull its edge there came hysterical tears.

The spasm was slow in passing, but finally her slim shoulders ceased to heave, and she could think more or less clearly again. All was silence about her. Raising her head, she peeked over one arm and saw Maggie and Mike lying placidly nearby. Maggie's ears perked up. Mike, not the sentimental type, merely slapped the ground with one paw and went back to his nap. Around the two cats was nothing to indicate any untoward event.

GRETA CLOSED her eyes and partially surrendered to the weakness within her. And, wearily calm now, her mind found one small thing to be thankful for. At least, she told herself, they're clean cats. They have good manners. If they'd been... messy, I don't think I could have stood it.

In a little while, she got to her feet, still weak of body but, strangely enough, stronger in mind. It had been one thing to decide previously that this sort of affair would be inevitable, but quite another to be an eye witness to the doing thereof. But now, having been a witness, Greta had acquired a sort of strength from it. It was still revolting, but evidently, the human mind has depths of power from which to draw. In the battle for survival, even the most horrible occurences can be tolerated.

"The important thing is to live," she whispered. "That above all. To live and go forward. I must find out what happened to Dad and Cort and Butch. I must. But I've got to be careful. Dash in wildly and I'll defeat my own purpose. I must investigate each step before I take it. If a Tall One ever gets his hands on me, I'm through."

She entered the ship without fear now, and searched about for any possible weapon which might have been left behind. She found none. But she afforded herself the luxury of a change of clothing. She then went down the ramp to where the cats were waiting. She climbed on Maggie's back and dug her heels into the cat's sides. "Up, baby," she commanded. "Back to the hills. We've got to find a secluded place where there's water and privacy. A hideout, I believe they call it."

BOSS HAGERTY did not trust Korbo. He had never liked the man, and had used him only because he seemed the best of a sorry lot. Korbo, inherently more cruel than most of the larger Pentarians, had served Boss Hagerty well, but mainly because he was watched day and night by the cunning Earthman. Hagerty knew Korbo would have delighted at an opportunity to cut his benefactor's throat.

In spite of his great success on Pentar, Hagerty was lonely for his own kind. He was lord and master of these retarded people, but he had not a friend among them. He had the fear of all and the respect of a great many, but these were poor substitutes for genuine friendship. He could only get that, he felt, from those of his own kind, and he had taken an immediate secret liking to Cort and the redoubtable Butch. They were the sort he had met often at smokers and political rallies on Earth, and his heart warmed to them.

He had made plans to include them in his organization almost at first sight, but he wanted to do it right and, according to his philosophies, there was only one correct way to

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win their friendship and loyalty. In the political jargon which was Hagerty's basic manner of thinking, it amounted to this: Get 'em in a spot and then pull 'em out. Make 'em grateful. Put 'em under obligation and they got to be yours.

That's how he was working with Cort and Butch. They were in the spot now, and all that remained was to pull them out of it. One fine morning, he went about it. During an inspection of Plant Number Two, he kept a sharp eye out for the pair. He spotted them finally, carrying overloaded sacks of material up a sharp incline toward a reducing mill. Hagerty immediately went straight up in the air. He whirled on Korbo, who was showing him about the mill. "What the hell goes on here? Those two men! Get them over here, quick."

Dumbfounded, Korbo signalled to the three guards he'd put over the Earthmen, and they were pushed down the hill to face Hagerty.

The little man's face was crimson. "You trying to put something over on me?" he snarled. "Who told you to put these men into the factory? Talk, and talk fast!"

"Why, you gave the order yourself," Korbo said.

"You're a damn liar! I didn't say that at all. Now, tell me exactly what I did say."

"Ah—ah—you said, take care of these boys—take care of them good."

"And that's exactly what I meant. You're getting too big for your shoes, Korbo. Twisting my words around to suit yourself. These are Earthmen, and nothing is too good for them. Remember that."

HAGERTY turned to Cort and to Butch with an expansive smile. He noted with satisfaction that they'd had a tough time of it. They were psychologically right for the treatment. Handled correctly, they'd eliminate Korbo and step into his shoes with alacrity.

"It was all a mistake, boys. I'm sorry as hell. Here, all the time I thought you were living the easy life. That's what comes when you trust one of these dumb Pentarians. Come on over to the commissary and get something to eat, and we'll have a talk. A long talk."

With a threatening look at the silent Korbo, he hooked his arms into those of Cort and Butch and hustled them down the street.

"Did you say something about eating?" Butch asked.

Hagerty laughed. "That's what I said. The best in the house. Some way, I've got to convince you boys I had nothing to do with this."

A few minutes later, when seated across from the two men and marveling at the volume of food Butch could cram into his mouth at one time, Hagerty went on: "You boys may be wondering some about me. Maybe you're still a little suspicious on account of I had you worked over there by the Flame Pool. But when you get to know me better, you'll understand. I was fussed up because you lied to me about the girl. I hate lying and disloyalty of any kind, but when somebody goes all the way with me, there's nothing I won't do for him."

Butch nodded understandingly between bites. Cort said nothing.

"I'm looking for a couple of boys like you. Been meaning to get rid of Korbo for a long time, and this piece of stupidity is the last straw."

"There's an old man here named Lansing," Cort said. "The same one you told us had run away. What about that?"

"Lansing—here? My God! Korbo told me he'd skipped out." Hagerty banged the table with his fist. "See what I'm up against? Lies! Deceit!

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How would you boys like to take care of Korbo right now and step into his shoes?" Hagerty grinned warmly. "After what he's done to you, it would probably be a pleasure, eh?"

"It sure would," Butch agreed.

"I thought so. You boys had enough to eat?"

Cort looked at Butch. "I have. What about you?"

"I guess so."

They got to their feet, and Butch stepped around the table toward Hagerty. Then, he stopped and glanced back at Cort. He said, "I'm sorry pal. I'm damned sorry, but I just can't help myself."

"It's all right. But let's match to see who does it."

"No time," Butch replied.

He hit Boss Hagerty squarely on the point of the chin. As Hagerty back-pedalled, he followed closely and hit him again in the same place. Hagerty went down like a sack of meal. Butch rubbed his knuckles and sighed. "That probably means our finish, but it was worth it."

He smiled dreamily and Cort said, "You're right. It was worth it. Let's get back to work. When the end comes, we want to be found serenely doing our duty, don't we?"

"You said it. Let's go."

KORBO SAT in his office tapping the edge of a sheet of paper against his desk. Written upon the sheet was a death warrant for two Earthmen. A short time previously, Korbo would have been delighted to carry out that order personally. Now, he wasn't so sure.

He was a cold and ruthless man, Korbo, but deep in his slow-moving mind was a spark of admiration for those more courageous than himself. He had hated and feared the blustering little Hagerty for a long time. He'd longed to do exactly what he'd seen done that day. Sitting there, he relived the scene, marvelling at it. Two abused, underfed, overworked Earthmen had sealed their doom by knocking the most important man on the planet stone cold. What nerve! What utterly sublime courage. Flaunting a deathless spirit in the face of oppression; laughing into the abyss of oblivion.

Korbo did not want to kill the two men. He wanted to continue admiring them in the living flesh. But there again arose his own fear of Hagerty. Did he dare flaunt this execution order? Did he dare risk his own life by defying Hagerty?

He wasn't sure. It would take a little mulling over. But he was certainly going to take his time in complying with the instruction.

Came the swift Pentarian nightfall and the two Earthlings were still carrying sacks up the hill. "I don't get it," Cort growled. "Is he playing cat and mouse with us?"

"I don't get it either," Butch said. "We should have been cold meat hours ago. Here, it's almost time to catch a couple hours sleep, and we're still alive. What do you suppose gives?"

Cort heaved a sack to his shoulder. "I don't know. We'll just have to wait and see."

BOSS HAGERTY was worried. Strange, disquieting things had been happening on his little planet. A mystery he could not solve had come into being, and he was losing plenty of sleep over it. Scowling darkly, he got up from his chair and paced the confines of his office.

On his third trip around, he was interrupted by the opening of a door, and his horse-faced female Pentarian secretary pushed her ugly head inside. That alone would have been enough to upset Hagerty on even a normal

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day. But on this day, it was more maddening than usual. "What do you want?" he snarled.

"Lorker, head of your confidential squad, is waiting to see you."

"Well, don't stand there! Send him in."

The woman withdrew her formidable visage and Hagerty grimaced in disgust. "Me having to look at that puss when there's a dish like Greta Lansing loose somewhere on Pentar. By God, when I find that girl—"

Lorker, a poker-faced young Pentarian, walked into the office and stood waiting. He was chief of a group Hagerty had trained for missions he didn't care to entrust to Korbo. And this particular mission was certainly one of those.

"Well," Hagerty demanded. "Any word of her?"

"No, master, but two more of my men have disappeared."

Hagerty scowled ferociously and chewed on his cigar. "Listen to me, punk! I don't like reports like that. They make me mad. I turned this mission over to you because I thought you had the stuff. I left it up to you. All I said was: 'That girl's somewhere on Pentar. Find her.' And you keep coming in and telling me your men disappear into thin air. Just how are you handling this caper, anyhow?"

The tall youth shrugged. "To the best of my ability, master. I send the men out in pairs with orders to scour the country."

"In pairs?"

"Yes. It seems to me that a couple of able-bodied men should be a match for one Earthgirl if they come upon her."

HAGERTY glared suspiciously. "How do I know a couple of your boys haven't found her and stashed her away somewhere for themselves? How do I know you haven't done it?"

"The master has no reason to question our loyalty."

"I suppose you're right, but what the hell is happening to them?"

"I don't know. They go out to cover an area according to instructions and just don't come back. A pair were due in last night. This morning, I personally followed the route they took and found nothing. I went over the ground inch by inch."

"You didn't find any trace of them?"

The Pentarian hesitated. "I found something, but I hesitate to describe it, as it may have no connection with the case."

"Quit being coy. What was it?"

"What appeared to be the tracks of some strange animals. Great footprints the size of five dinner plates laid in a circle. I know of no animal that could make such a track. It disturbs me."

Hagerty pointed a sudden finger. "Say! Maybe you've got something. I thought they were full of hop when they told me about those Martian tigers, but by God they weren't! It was on the level! That's what's been happening. Those cats have been eating your boys for breakfast."

The Pentarian paled at the thought. "But, master. They had guns! And I've gone over the ground. There was no blood."

"Martian cats eat a man like a tabby eats a mouse. There's never any blood. They start at one end and just munch him down. Say! I wonder if that girl is with the cats! She must be. The boys said they saw her riding one of them."

"What are your orders, master?"

"I want that girl, damn it. I'll call out a regiment. Two regiments. We'll get on the march and comb the planet, if necessary."

"Then, you will instruct Korbo?"

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"Korbo hell! He'd grab the dame for himself. I'm putting you in charge of this. Use your own judgement, but get results. Use the whole army if you have to."

"Yes, master," and the Pentarian saluted and left.

After he was gone, Hagerty went to the far wall of his office and stood looking into a mirror. "Why," he complained in a hurt voice, "do I have such a hell of a time getting my hands on a woman?"

BUTCH RAISED a weary arm and made a mark on the wall of the cell. "I can't stand much more of this," he growled. "Even if we are still alive a week after we should be dead, I can't stand it. I'm ready to take a swing at the closest guard and go down fighting."

Cort dug his fingers into the itching stubble on his jowls and scratched viciously. "I'm about ready to concede that's the only way to do it. Hit and run. It's a million to two, but maybe at least one of us could run the gauntlet. Even if we didn't, it would be better than this."

"When we go back to work?"

"Right. I'd been hoping for at least half a break, but it doesn't look as though we're going to get it. Wait any longer and we won't have strength to hit anybody."

Butch was going to reply, but at that moment the boulder in the corner of the cell stirred and both men went over to help lift it. When the space underneath was large enough, John Lansing wriggled into the cell like a snake out from under a rock. The boulder dropped back into place and Butch slumped back against the wall, his eyes on the old man.

"What keeps you going, anyhow?" Butch asked. "You got more guts than any six men I ever met. Why don't you just up and die?"

There was an undercurrent of tension in Lansing's manner. "Hope, my boy. Only hope keeps me alive, and tonight that hope has flared up brightly. There's something in the wind. Something wonderful." He wagged a bony finger at Cort. "Tell me—have you noticed the change lately in the Hairless Ones?"

"I haven't paid much attention to them."

"That's because they've let you alone. They haven't tormented you. Also, they've quit abusing me and have actually grown friendly and told me of things coming over the grapevine. All their hatred is now concentrated on Boss Hagerty, and they don't seem to have any to spare for other Earthlings."

"What about the grapevine?" Butch asked. "What's coming over it?"

Lansing leaned forward, his sunken eyes aglow. "Word of a girl, a fabulous creature whom the Hairless Ones have adopted as a goddess. There is a weird story of how she made their priest disappear into thin air by the power of her magic. All fictitious, of course, but that isn't the point. I think the girl really exists. They say she rides through the sky on two great animals, the like of which the Hairless Ones have never seen. They say—"

Cort and Butch spoke in unison: "Greta! Greta and the cats!"

LANSING smiled in pride. "I thought it would dawn on you. Greta, my daughter. She's become the focal point for an uprising of the Hairless Ones."

"Then she isn't dead," Cort exclaimed. "Somehow, she avoided capture and learned to exist on the devil's own planet. She's alive!"

"Do you suppose," Butch asked, "that she's rallying the Hairless Ones

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into a revolt? What does the grapevine say about that?"

"It is vague on the how and where of the thing. I was unable—"

Lansing stopped speaking abruptly and shrank back in sudden fear. The heads of both Butch and Cort snapped around and their muscles tensed. There was a time of utter silence.

So great had been their concentration on the startling news that they hadn't seen the cell door open slowly; nor had they heard Korbo enter the cell. He moved softly for a man of his size, and now he stood beside the open doorway regarding them in the dim half light.

"Okay, Oversize," Butch grunted. "Is the firing squad waiting for us?"

"Take it easy on the old man," Cort requested. "He means no harm. He just came in for a chat."

"I would consider it an honor to die with—these men," John Lansing said calmly.

For a time, Korbo did not answer. He stood silently regarding them. "You are a strange race, you Earthlings," he said finally. "Courage seems to be a part of your makeup. That is not so on Pentar. It is not so with me. I am a coward at heart, as are all the rest of my race, and I have a great longing to be a brave man."

"Well, I'll be damned," Butch muttered.

"Lately, I have shown the first glimmer of courage I have ever been able to dredge up out of my being. I have let you live in direct defiance of the master's orders."

"What are you getting at, Korbo?" Cort asked. "You didn't come in here because you like our company."

"On the contrary—I did. I like your company very much."

"Are you sure this about-face isn't motivated by the threatened uprising of the Hairless Ones? You admit you're a coward. Are you sure you aren't just trying to save yourself if things get tough?"

"You're taking a lot for granted," Korbo answered, "but I'll reply to your questions. Frankly, I thought of the same possibility myself. I have always believed a man should know himself thoroughly, and I can safely say the possibility of the Hairless Ones striking back has nothing to do with this decision. You forget that they haven't a chance of success, whatever their actions. Yet, I am willing to fight with them. I will join their cause before the victory is won or lost. Does that convince you?"

"What makes you think they haven't a chance?"

Korbo shrugged. "What makes you think they have? But one more thing: A condition to my turning from my own people. If by some long chance you are able to reach your ship and leave this planet, I would return with you to Earth. I have a great longing to be among people who rate courage as a virtue. Possibly, in a little time, I can learn it from your race."

Butch was bouncing with impatience. "Wait a minute. You mean the Space Wagon? Can it still be navigated?"

"I don't know. I've inspected it and there doesn't appear to be anything radically wrong. Of course, I don't know too much about such things."

John Lansing was still bewildered about the whole thing. "Am I to understand—" he began.

But the sharp voice of Boss Hagerty over-rode that of the old man as Hagerty and two armed Tall Ones crowded into the cell.

"All right, boys," Hagerty snapped. "Cover them! We'll make short work of this little clam-bake!"

GRETA LANSING had developed into a strangely dual young wom-

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an during the time she had run wild across Pentar in the company of her two great cats. Dual in that she was both happy and unhappy at the same time.

Relative to her father and her companions of the space trip, she was bitterly unhappy. She had devised no way of helping them—in fact, had not even been able to discover where they were being held, if they were still alive. This frustration and uncertainty was with her day and night, and she upbraided herself for lack of ability to take advantage of the good fortune which was hers. It seemed to her that a goddess should be able to promote a little security for those she loved. But even armed with divinity so far as the Hairless Ones were concerned, and armed more realistically with Maggie and Mike, she could still devise no way to make use of them.

On the other side of the picture was her new-found sense of freedom which amounted to intoxication. It was a heady thing to ride like the wind across Pentar on the back of the swift Martian cat. It gave her a sense of delicious power to exert a control over these two magnificent beasts. In the deep rocky fastnesses of Pentar, she had worked diligently to make the cats even more subservient, and she had succeeded well. Even the truculent Mike would leap down a hundred-foot gorge to spring back with a stick in his mouth. Maggie would roll over and play dead upon order, and both cats would stop dead in their tracks at a command from Greta.

The problem of food had not come up, forage having been thoughtfully provided by Boss Hagerty. It seemed that each day at mealtime a pair of grim, gun-toting Tall Ones turned up on schedule, so Greta had never found out if a hungry Martian tiger would eat a friend when famished. Both Maggie and Mike became most proficient in bringing down an armed man. There would be a period of quiet stalking while Greta hid in a convenient cave; then a quick whirlwind rush and it would be all over.

Greta had avoided the Hairless Ones also, mainly because she didn't know what to do about them. They were hardly people she cared to pal around with, and somehow she felt she should keep her escutcheon of goddess clean and shining by the glamor of absence. She had seen several of them peering out at her from various vantage points as she traveled over Pentar, but she had always passed them by like a beautiful nymph on an orange and black cloud.

THERE CAME a day, however, when this situation changed. Upon this day, she was lying in a grassy nook by a spring pulling dreamily at Maggie's whiskers, when two Hairless Ones popped their heads from behind a rock nearby. Both Maggie and Mike sniffed lazily. They had known full well of their presence before the little men had appeared, but the cats exhibited only lazy contempt. They were entirely satisfied with their diet of Tall Ones.

Greta half expected the Hairless Ones to flee in terror, but they did no such thing. Their fear was outwardly apparent but they came forward nonetheless, crawling along on their bellies with their noses brushing the ground.

The girl waited in interest for their next move. Mike raised his head and growled a warning, but Greta silenced him with a command and asked: "What do you want?"

The ugly little monsters trembled, but one of them got up courage to speak. "Our people beaten down—in bondage. Unhappy."

"That's too bad. Is there something

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I can do?"

There was a new trembling in both men now, and Greta recognized it as eagerness. "Hairless Ones would fight," the spokesman said. "Fight good for their freedom. They need their goddess to lead. Goddess could free them. Free others in factories, too."

"Others? What others?"

"Earthlings held to work in factories."

Greta sprang forward and grasped the man by his thick arm. "How many Earthlings? What do they look like?"

The man cringed and put his face against the ground, but he spoke up clearly: "Three—all men. Two young—big. One most old—hardly alive."

A feeling of quick gratitude swept through Greta. She wanted to cry and laugh and shout to the hills for joy. They were still alive! Dad and Cort and Butch! Still alive, even though held in the grip of Hagerty and his awful Tall Ones!

"Of course we will free them!" she cried. "We will free all Pentar!"

At that moment, there was a sudden diversion as a squadron of some fifty Tall Ones came swiftly into view from beyond the rocks. From where they stood, the tableau of the beautiful girl, the cats, and the two Hairless Ones was visible as though on a stage.

THE TWO Hairless Ones cringed and whimpered. Greta herself would probably have been terror-stricken a few moments before, but now things were different. She was full of fire at the tremendous news.

Drawing herself up like a goddess, she spoke to the Hairless Ones: "Be not afraid. Merely sit on those rocks and watch. Then, return and tell your friends what you saw."

The Tall Ones, recovering from their surprise at stumbling upon their quarry, let out a joyous whoop and started up the slight incline toward Greta. The girl spoke sharply; "Maggie! Mike! Take 'em! Take 'em, babies! Clean 'em out!"

The terrible Martian cats rose up in all their ferocity. With twin screams of rage, they swept from a lazy crouch into projectile-like movement, and were upon the Tall Ones before the men could raise a weapon.

Nothing in all creation is so devastating as a Martian hill cat when the killing lust is upon it. At least ten of the Tall Ones died during their first moment of frozen terror. The rest dispersed in panic. Two of these fell, and the cats began to mop up.

Now, Greta really tested for the first time her absolute power over the cats. "Stop! At rest, Maggie! Hold it, Mike! Come back! Come lie down!" She called out the commands with no great expectation of their being obeyed. But Maggie dropped instantly to the ground, rubbing her belly in the dirt and snarling. Then, she turned and came trotting back up the incline. Mike also dropped what he was doing and looked at his mate as though he thought she'd gone daft. Then he, too, came back to the family circle.

The Tall Ones were gone in panic. They would carry the word, Greta thought. Possibly other Tall Ones, upon hearing it, wouldn't be quite as good soldiers as they had been.

And the Hairless Ones would also carry the word. This she instructed them to do. "Go to all your people and tell them what you have seen. Tell them to assemble at the temple by the colored pool. I will come and lead them! Go!"

A few seconds later, the Hairless Ones had vanished also. Left alone, Greta did not feel quite so much like a goddess. Turning from the gory sight below, she dropped to her knees and buried her face in Maggie's

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shoulder. The cat turned her head in inquiry as Greta wept.

AS HAGERTY stepped into the cell, both Cort and Butch had the same thought at the same instant. This was it. Sure death, if something wasn't done quickly. Without a word, they sprang forward, and so closely were they in rapport, that they functioned as a team without losing a second.

Butch dived for the closest guard, while Cort went straight for Hagerty. He had to get the little Boss quick or they were through, because there was another guard to contend with. He drove a straight left at Hagerty's chin that, had it connected, would have sent the man into dreamland. But Hagerty moved enough to dull the blow.

Cort cursed his luck. No chance now. The other guard had had the second of time he needed to raise his gun. Viciously, Cort swung again at Hagerty. He was at least going to get one in before he went down. This time, the blow connected perfectly and Cort spun around to face the gun he knew was leveled.

But he was wrong. He had erroneously reckoned without Korbo. The second guard lay sprawled on the ground with Korbo rubbing his knuckles. "What do we do now?" the Pentarian asked blankly.

"Get the hell out of here!" Butch barked. "You're still in command out there. You can order them to let us through."

"I can't do that," Korbo replied as Butch's mouth dropped open. "I will fight my way out with you—die with you if necessary, but giving false orders would be treachery. I am a soldier, not a traitor."

Butch turned to Cort in amazement. "What goes with this guy? Is he nuts? I don't understand."

"He said he'd fight with us. Isn't that enough? Let's get started."

They filed swiftly out of the cell as Korbo said, "There shouldn't be too much trouble. Very few guards will be about. If we just go quietly."

But there was no quiet to be had. Other plans had been afoot—sinister plans—because from everywhere there appeared shadowy forms of Hairless Ones to join the group until it swelled into the dozens. Three guards appeared, to be cut down by the guns in possession of Cort and Butch.

Then, there were several others who, when they saw their allies slain, fled in terror.

"I told you all the Tall Ones are cowards," Korbo said.

"Then what's all the fuss about?" Butch wanted to know. "Cowards don't fight."

"They are craven, but they will win the last battle. Evidently, the Hairy Ones are assembling in response to some call for action. But they are helpless because they have no arms. When the final battle is fought, the Tall Ones will move like a solid wall spouting green death. The Hairless Ones will be beaten down."

"Okay," Butch replied. "But it's a swell way to die."

"That's what I want to learn," Korbo said with deadly seriousness. "The ability to view things with that kind of courage."

"You're nuts," Butch said, but his tone was friendly, and there was a grin on his face.

THE HAIRLESS Ones seemed to know where they were going. They tended to ignore the Earthlings, but suffered them to come along as the squat little men babbled in their own tongue and seemed to glow with a great hope.

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Dawn shot up over the horizon, and Cort could see several hundred of the small men, a fair-sized army.

But this army, it developed, did not arrive in time to join the battle. They got there only in time to function as spectators. As they came over a long rise, the plain before the rock pile housing the Flame pool, was spread out before them. On the rocks and along the base of them, were several thousand Hairless Ones.

Moving in across the flats was what Korbo had predicted—a solid wall of Tall Ones moving against the revolutionists. Each man carried two deadly guns—an impenetrable wall of death.

"See," Korbo said sadly. "It is as I told you. What chance have the Hairless Ones?"

"They'll have a better chance if we can get there to help them," Cort said. "Let's go."

The group started to run and Korbo with them, but shaking his head in bewilderment the while. "I can't understand it," he said. "Men walking into certain death and eager to get there."

At that moment, the Tall army opened fire. Streams of deadly green flame poured into the Hairless Ones, cutting them down by the dozens.

"The damned murderers," Butch screamed. "Can't we do something?" In desperation, he poured his own fire at the killers and succeeded in stilling a couple of the guns.

Then, a strange thing occurred. Down the rocks from above came two great Martian tigers, screaming and roaring out their hatred. On the back of one rode a girl who looked like a goddess. Head thrown back, the wind streaming through her short hair, she called out for courage among the Hairless Ones.

The cats sailed over the massed unfortunates in a single great leap, and streaked straight toward the wall of death.

And the wall faltered. The green fire fizzled away as the terrified Tall Ones forgot their deadly weapons in the face of their fear—fear of this terrible goddess they'd heard about.

Greta dropped from Maggie's back and strode to encourage the misshappen little fighters to again take up the war. This while the cats began a fearful slaughter of their own. Thus, the tide of battle turned. The Tall Ones had swiftly lost a war.

"THANK GOD the ship's okay" Cort said. "We'll take this stinking little ward heeler back to Earth with us. He's got to face a murder rap."

In handcuffs, Hagerty rolled his cigar and was noticeably glum. "It was a sweet racket," he said. "I'm damned if I can see why you had to stick your nose in and break it up."

"Shut up, half-pint," Butch said. Then, to Korbo, "But you, my friend, are not going back with us. You're staying here."

The Tall One put out a hand in protest. "But you promised."

"Yes," Cort said, "but things have changed. Word is out that you're needed here. The Hairless Ones trust you and the Tall Ones, I think, have learned a lesson. This planet needs a wise head to chart it over the rough spots to come. Also, a courageous man," Cort added with inflection.

Korbo's eyes opened wide. "You mean—"

"I mean this: There is nothing you can learn about courage on Earth. In fact, you could teach us a few things."

"It's all very bewildering," the Tall One said seriously. "Very bewildering."

A short time later, Cort walked with Greta near the big ship which would take them back to Earth. It

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was the first time he'd really gotten her alone since the great battle. He felt a trifle awed, a little uncomfortable. "There—there are quite a few things I'd like to say—"

She came close. "Why don't you just kiss me, darling?"

Cort was kissing her again some time later when Butch hove in sight. Butch grinned. "Love's grand, I guess, but it's not for me. Guess I'm unlucky that way."

He grinned, and called back over his shoulder, "I still got my cats."

Greta smiled sweetly and called back: "Are you sure about that?"

ATOMIC FORCE FIELDS

By JOHN WESTON

IF ANY single problem can be said to be the core of modern physics, it is the question about the nature of forces within the atom. We are familiar with electromagnetic waves and with electric and magnetic fields. We know that these latter guide the electrons circling the nuclei of atoms. They can be dealt with experimentally and mathematically.

But what about the forces within the atom? What holds the nucleas of an atom together? If an atom is made up of protons (positively charged particles) and neutrons, what prevents it from flying apart spontaneously? This should happen because charges of like or similar polarity repel each other.

The scientist answers with a vague smile, "nuclear forces." But he doesn't even give a hint of what these nuclear forces are like. It is known that nuclear forces differ from electromagnetic forces by their extremely short radii of action. They restrict themselves to the minute dimensions of the atomic nucleus. So far the scientist generalizes that these nuclear forces are such as to cause attraction between *like* particles (the protons) within an extremely short range. For this reason the atom holds together. Then in some cases, as in fission a neutron, in some subtle way, disrupts these forces when it enters the nucleus and the atom flies apart—with what results we already know from Hiroshima.

Mathematicians and mathematical physicists have been trying to come to grips with the matter—but fairly unsuccessfully. Yukawa through a mathematical analysis was able to predict the existence of the meson—which seems to be intimately tied up with nuclear matters—but beyond this nothing has been done.

Probably no single field of modern physics offers such a fertile ground for investigation, nor offers any more promise of great things, than this matter of nuclear forces. It is one of the great frontiers—as important to future advances in science as was the development of the quantum theory and relativity!

BEAUTY AND THE MACHINE

By WILLIAM KARNEY

THE WORLD of machine tools is a rather limited one, though it is important. You would think because of the importance of precision design almost all other qualities would be neglected. But this is far from true. There is a very active group of men whose primary concern is style. They simply don't take an electric motor, attach a shaft or spindle, fix a tool to it, and call the result, a machine tool.

Instead they employ all the arts of the artificer in packaging a neat attractive—even beautiful—assembly of metal parts, whose function will, if anything, be increased by good design. Men have discovered that attractive design, as well as functional, seems to be simply *good* design. The three ideas go together. If you build a machine to do a certain job, and it does that job perfectly, almost always it turns out that the machine as a certain esthetic appeal, a natural beauty inherent in it. This is not always the case, but is true nine out of ten times.

In certain complicated machinery, a lot of room is left for adding trim and flourishes. A designer who does this indiscriminately usually fails to produce a fine job. Such work is reminiscent of the old cast-iron ornamentation that used to be put on any piece of metal.

Machines with that subtle "under-life" of theirs seem to grow more beautiful as they grow more efficient. Go to such a basic case as that of electric motors. Examine one constructed twenty or thirty years ago and compare it with one built today. Invariably the latter is a trim functional attractive piece of design and a better machine.

Removing the false stream-lining and considering the sheer beauty of a machine, you also look at the quality of the object. Utility and appearance in machines follows—but not so in men!

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They stood in the tall grasses and in the glade, staring with curious eyes at the ship above

The CHILDREN

By Chester S. Geier

Who were these strange children on Hindemuth IV? And more important, could a man resist the desire to join them?...

IT WAS Sprague who first saw the figures moving through the vast alien forest beneath the cruising jeet. He overcame the massive inertia of his surprise; he pointed and spoke with a quiet intensity.

"Look, Ben! Down there!"

Dagget's ice-blue eyes flared as he peered earthward through the glass-clear transalloy walls of the cabin. In the forest below a score or more of tiny shapes were visible as they crossed open spaces in the network of trees, running to follow the jeet's flight.

"People!" Dagget burst out, awe sharpening the bass timbre of his voice. "And, Phil...they look *human!*"

The awe in Dagget's tone found an echo in Sprague's long face. People ...*human people!* Was it possible? How many habitable planets had been discovered by the interstellar rovers of Earth? Sprague could not begin to remember. But he could remember that few of those planets had been inhabited by intelligent beings, that fewer still had been inhabited by beings even remotely human in appearance.

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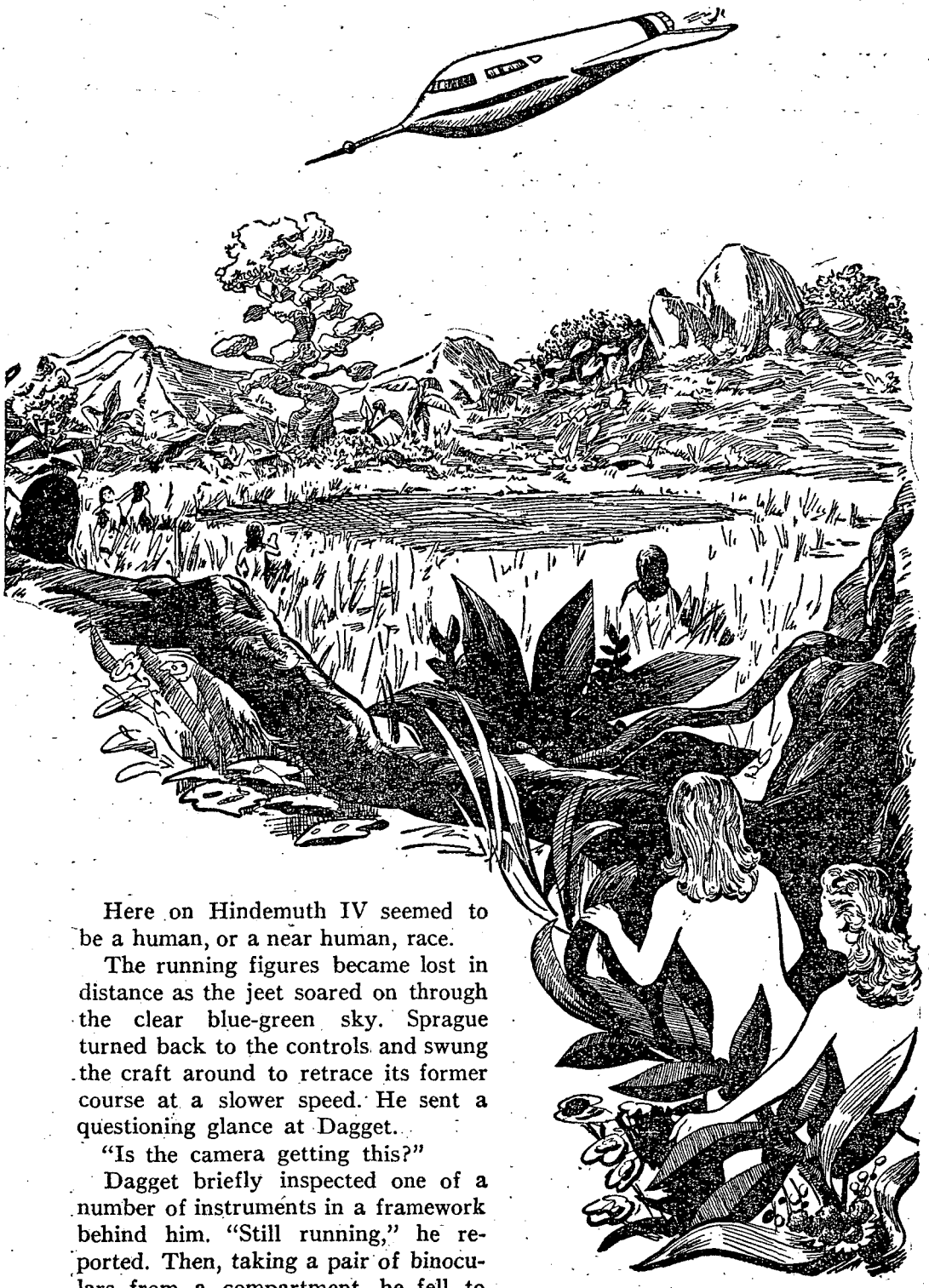

Here on Hindemuth IV seemed to be a human, or a near human, race.

The running figures became lost in distance as the jeet soared on through the clear blue-green sky. Sprague turned back to the controls and swung the craft around to retrace its former course at a slower speed. He sent a questioning glance at Dagget.

"Is the camera getting this?"

Dagget briefly inspected one of a number of instruments in a framework behind him. "Still running," he reported. Then, taking a pair of binoculars from a compartment, he fell to

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an intent scrutiny of the changing terrain below.

"I can see them again," he announced presently. He released a whispered exclamation. "What in space—! Phil... they're kids!"

Sprague stared at the other for a moment, disbelieving; then he took the binoculars and peered downward in turn.

Dagget's eyes had not been playing tricks. Magnified now, the moving shapes were indeed those of children; slim brown children, long-haired and unclothed, gesturing up at the jeet in evident excitement. Amid the shadowed green forest setting they had an unreal, elfin appearance—almost like creatures out of fantasy.

"Put the ship down, Phil," Dagget said abruptly. "We've got to give this a first-hand scanning. It... why, it's almost the biggest thing that's happened since interstellar travel!"

Sprague shook his head slowly. "This is an alien planet, Ben, and those kids down there are members of an alien race. We can't take chances until we know much more than we do right now. There must be adults around somewhere; we don't know how they'll react to us."

"Guess you're on course there." Dagget's lips took on a sullen curve that denied his spoken agreement.

"The camera is getting all this," Sprague went on. "We'll check the film when we get back to the ship and see what it shows. We might find something we missed."

"We didn't find the Colonial Administration ship," Dagget returned. "If it's here at all." His resentment was now obvious.

Sprague was aware of it, but for the moment he occupied himself with swinging the jeet around again. Then he said mildly, "The Colonial Administration ship might be here for all you know, Ben."

THE OTHER'S head swung around in growing ill-temper. "You know blasted well how I feel about this little junket of yours. We've already spent a year in galactic space, searching for the Colonial ship. We covered the area to which we were assigned; headquarters didn't tell us to do any more than that. But, instead of hypering back to the System, you take a jump out here, to Hindemuth IV, a planet right in the middle of nowhere."

Sprague lifted his spare shoulders. "I had the idea that the ship might be here, if it wasn't anywhere else."

"Idea!" Dagget snorted. "I call it an attack of space fits."

"Up to a certain limit you're welcome to your own opinions," Sprague answered calmly. He made a slight correction in the jeet's course and went on, "Special Services Division has a habit of expecting considerably more from its members than is stated in orders. It's an official if unwritten rule. You should have thought of that when you volunteered, Ben."

"I was thinking of the nice long vacations between jobs," Dagget grunted. "But now I'm beginning to see I made a mistake. I should have stayed with the Space Force."

"But you didn't," Sprague pointed out. "That's partly the reason why you're here right now, instead of in some pleasure dive back in the System, swilling aphrolac with a bunch of dizzy females."

"Partly?" Dagget questioned. His freckled, muscular features were sardonic; a long-smoldering hostility showed in the hard thrust of his eyes.

"Partly," Sprague said. "The other part is that I happened to remember Special Service agents are often required to use brains in carrying out orders. So when we were briefed on

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our search for the missing Colonial ship, I decided to do a little checking in Galactic Department archives. I looked up the reports and records of the ship's commander—and came across the name of the sun in this planetary system: Hindemuth. The commander had discovered and named it a number of years back, while running a Mapping Bureau ship; but his find had remained unofficial. The matter was never referred to the Expeditions Bureau, or to authorities in the Galactic Department. It received no attention or publicity whatever, and stayed buried in a mass of other records."

"Something's out of place there," Dagget muttered, grudgingly interested. "The Galactic Department usually doesn't slip up like that. Little things like newly discovered suns that might have planets are too important to overlook."

"The commander in question *wanted* the matter to be overlooked," Sprague said. "That showed in the way he worded his report and presented his figures. He didn't want to tell all, but at the same time he wanted to play safe in the event that official inquiries were later made."

"What do you suppose was his idea?"

"A likely guess is that he hoped the find would be important, and if important, he wanted to make it in something more than a routine and subordinate capacity."

"But how can you be certain that he made a jump to the Hindemuth system while in command of the Colonial Administration ship?"

"I checked on that, too," Sprague said. "If you take the galactic co-ordinates of the planet for which the Colonial ship was bound and run them off on a computer for deviations in the Hyper-Drive co-ordinates, you find that one particular jump will end up in the general neighborhood of Hindemuth."

"All right," Dagget growled. "Say he came here. Where is the ship? Where are the colonists who were aboard? This fourth planet is the only habitable one in the Hindemuth system, and we've already searched most of it. This is the last great island. We haven't found any evidence—"

Dagget broke off; he was suddenly rigid. "The children!"

Sprague shook his head. "I know what you're thinking; but the Colonial ship vanished slightly more than four years ago. There weren't any children aboard. The colonists were all young married couples. And in four years they couldn't have had children as grown as the ones we saw... The children seem to be members of a race native to this world; a race living at a very primitive level of culture. We've seen no buildings, no towns or communities of any sort."

"That puts us exactly where we started from," Dagget pointed out with bleak satisfaction. "I'm glad to hear you finally admit it."

Sprague shrugged. "The instruments might have turned up something this trip. We'll check them as soon as we get back to the cruiser."

THE CRUISER stood roughly in the center of a small, shallow valley, looking like a slender metal tower as it rested in a vertical position on its massive rear fins. It was not a large craft, as hyper-ships went, yet it dwarfed the approaching jeet.

Sprague touched a stud to send out a radio impulse that would open an entrance hatch in the cruiser's middle section. Deftly, then, he piloted the jeet through the hatch and into a catapult cradle within the parent vessel.

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The hatch automatically closed. Sprague and Dagget busied themselves with the instruments inside the jeet, removing the various types of recordings. With these they strode to a small elevator and rode up to the control and living quarters near the cruiser's bow. They reached the large, semi-circular room which was used as a headquarters, and here they removed their plasti-leather coveralls, retaining only the short-sleeved shirts and knee-length trunks which were worn aboard ship.

"I'm hungry," Dagget said. "Suppose we have something to eat before getting to work?"

"Eat if you want to," Sprague returned shortly. "I'm going to get started on the data we gathered."

He took a cigarette from a desk humidor, the green-gold tobacco showing through the thin, transparent casing. He puffed the cigarette alight, frowning.

"There's something about this world that bothers me, and I want to get to the nucleus of it. I've seen too many men die on too many worlds to ignore my hunches about this one."

"What do you think is wrong?"

"I don't know. It might be some quality about Hindemuth IV; it might be those kids we saw."

Sprague shrugged impatiently and gathered up the recordings. He strode into the adjoining laboratory.

Dagget followed, his hunger evidently forgotten.

They fell to work with various types of apparatus, moving with skilled swiftness. Sprague concentrated on the camera film; processing this, he inserted it into a projector, setting the editor mechanism so that only certain subjects would be shown on the screen. Then he connected the projector to a self-adjusting magnification device and switched it on.

Colored images raced across the screen. The first were of Hindemuth IV's terrain, a montage of forests and plains, of rivers and hill ranges. Then a scene came sharply into focus, greatly magnified. A group of children stood in a forest glade, staring upward. They wore no clothing. Untrimmed hair rippled about their shoulders: red hair and blond, brown hair and black. In physical appearance all seemed of the same approximate age, which according to Earth standards would have been some ten years.

The children were staring skyward in excitement and wonder. The jeet, which was obviously the focus of their interest, seemed to fascinate and puzzle them.

Then they were running to keep it in sight. Several called and gestured to companions elsewhere in the forest; others appeared, joining the original group; and the swarm of hurrying, slim bodies appeared and vanished between them and the forest floor.

The children were left behind; then they came back into view as the jeet swung around. Again they were running to follow its flight, laughing and shouting.

Finally the children were gone, and once the colors in the screen raced without form. Nothing else came into focus.

A frown on his long face, Sprague turned away from the screen. He sent a brief glance at Dagget, who had interrupted his own work to watch.

"Just the children," he said. "No adults, no buildings, no sign of the Colonial ship."

"This children angle doesn't make sense," Dagget muttered. "There would have to be adults somewhere around."

SPRAGUE shook his head in mystification. "We saw no sign of them—and the camera covers a lot of

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territory. Children as a rule don't stray great distances from their parents." His mouth tightened. "I'm going to crack this if it's the last thing I do. The answer is here, somewhere—and I'm going to find it....Right now, we'll get this work out of the way."

They returned their attention to the recordings that remained. Silence filled the laboratory, a silence that seemed one with the vast, brooding silence of the world outside the cruiser.

Sprague felt the silence. It had a quality of mystery, of lurking threat. It was a thing that seemed to penetrate the walls of the ship by a kind of osmosis. It was like a presence that remained unseen wherever one might turn, watching and waiting.

A gasp from Dagget broke the silence. Sprague glanced at him, dropping a spool of metal tape that unwound itself on the floor with a brittle, whirring noise.

"Ben—what is it?"

Dagget straightened convulsively. "Nothing. I just thought—nothing. Guess I made a mistake."

Sprague continued to look at the muscular, red-headed man. He had known Dagget too long to mistake the signs—Dagget was hiding something. Dagget looked steadily at a point on the workbench before him, not meeting Sprague's eyes. He rubbed a hand slowly down the side of his trunks.

Sprague crossed the distance between them with slow steps. He saw now that Dagget had been working over a radiation chart, a roll of thin plastic, marked with graph lines, over which ran an undulating red trail. The plastic roll had been placed in a translator and pantograph mechanism, which automatically recorded the data on a looseleaf sheet.

Sprague was turning toward the sheet, when Dagget interposed his body with a quick step.

"It was nothing, Phil—just a mistake."

Sprague said sharply, "At ease, Lieutenant!"

Dagget hesitated, his muscular features desperate. Then he nodded at what he saw in Sprague's face.

"Aye...Captain."

He stepped away from the workbench.

Sprague ran a quick forefinger down a column of symbols and figures on the sheet. The finger stopped; he drew in his breath, then expelled it in swift, startled words.

"Cosmium! There's cosmium here. The planet's filthy with it. If these figures are right—"

"They can't be!" Dagget said. "It must be some kind of a mistake. Something must have gone wrong with the apparatus."

Sprague shook his head slowly, studying the sheet again. "These radiation figures check perfectly for cosmium—right down to the last decimal place. If there had been even a slight deviation either way... But there isn't. The figures check. And, great space, from the intensity of the radiations, this island must be a regular cosmium treasure trove!"

Dagget said nothing; he stared brooding-eyed through the broad transalloy viewport in the curving wall of the semi-circular room.

Sprague probed at the red-headed man's expression. He said softly:

"You tried to hide this cosmium data from me, Ben. What was the idea?"

Dagget jerked his heavy shoulders. "No idea; just an attack of space fits, I guess." Then defiance blazed in his face; he indicated the room with a sudden, savage sweep of his hand. "We've been boxed up here, more or less, for over a year. I'm sick of it. I keep thinking of all the other

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jobs like this ahead."

"Why don't you quit the Service, then?" Sprague demanded.

"And take a steady, day-to-day job at a lower salary? That's no solution." Dagget leaned forward, his ice-blue eyes bright and fixed. "But the cosmium here, on Hindemuth IV, *is* a solution. You know how rare the stuff is. Why, hardly more than a gram or two has ever been found at any one time. And only one sun system out of a dozen contains any cosmium, as a rule. A couple of grams of the stuff are worth a fortune, and there's more that that here—enough to make us rich a hundred times over."

SPRAGUE shook his head. "You seem badly mixed up about this, Ben. The cosmium we've found doesn't belong to us; it belongs to the Federation. We're representatives, not independent agents. We'll get a reward, of course, but—"

"A reward!" Dagget snorted. "A reward would be a piece of vacuum compared to what we could have by keeping the discovery to ourselves.... Look, Phil, nobody else knows about Hindemuth IV; the information is buried in Galactic Department records. And nobody knows we came here—nobody will ever have to know.

"We could easily falsify our records, hide every trace of our jump to Hindemuth. It would be simple to extract several grams of cosmium and sell it through agents in the System, keeping our own knowledge and identities hidden. That would be the start; with the money we could put an expedition together and return here."

Sprague shook his head again. "It's too big for us, Ben. If there's as much cosmium here as there seems, the whole thing could too easily get out of control. Furthermore, selling cosmium indiscriminately might all too easily mean that it would get into the wrong hands. The Federation is still young and unstable, and a sudden flood of cosmium is one of the things that would almost certainly upset it and bring on a galactic war.

"The way you propose to handle it, cosmium would get around everywhere except in the one quarter where it's badly needed—in the hands of scientists. They've been doing some wonderful things with the pitiful scraps they've managed to get their hands on. With a good supply to work with, there's any number of miracles they could accomplish for the benefit of the race. And only the Federation could make it available to them cheaply enough and in quantity."

Sprague jerked his hand in a conclusive gesture. "I don't want to throw my rank around, but I will if you make it necessary. My decision stands, and further discussion is closed.... If you resist me in any way, Ben, I'll give you a dose of morphelon and take you back to the System in deep-sleep."

Dagget looked at the tall, spare man. Sprague stood very quietly, his long face determined and implacable.

Moving his shoulders as though against an oppressive weight, Dagget turned away. "Time we had something to eat," he said. "I'll get the auto-chef started."

Sprague remained beside the workbench, staring down at the record roll.

That night, while Dagget slept, he moved soundlessly through the cruiser and made certain electronic connections.

MORNING sunlight poured in a pale-gold stream through the headquarters viewport as Sprague and Dagget climbed into their coveralls.

"We'll land and have a close look at the kids this time," Sprague said. "And while we're at it, we'll take check re-

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cordings on the cosmium data we got yesterday. We'll also take a last try at locating the colonial ship."

Dagget nodded equably, but his ice-blue eyes narrowed a moment later as Sprague picked up a small rectangular case.

"A couple of gadgets that might be useful in our interview with the kids," Sprague explained. "Let's go."

They descended to the hatch in the elevator. The jeet waited in its catapult cradle; entering, they adjusted the instruments at the rear of the cabin and then settled themselves in their seats.

Sprague's long fingers moved with swift skill over switches and buttons. The hatch opened, and with a kind of deliberate, smooth violence, the jeet shot into the outside air, impelled first by the catapult and then by the sibilant roar of its jets.

The cruiser fell away behind and below them, dwindling to toy-like proportions and then becoming lost in distance. The island's expanse resolved into a changing pattern of plains, hill ranges, and rivers. Bright silence lay like a crystal blanket over the scene; a complete, heavy silence, compounded partly of unrelieved wilderness, partly of absent moving life. No birds winged through the clear sky, no animal herds grazed on the rolling plains.

Sprague felt the silence close around him, and its quality of unseen threat fell like a chill over his thoughts. Here, on Hindemuth IV, was cosmium, one of the rarest and most valuable new elements unearthed by human science; cosmium in a quantity that meant power, not real and immediate power, but power in the abstract, the power that went with the mere knowledge that cosmium was present on this world. This knowledge could be the exclusive possession of a person or a group, could be an instrument or a weapon.

And the path to either possibility, he knew, radiated invisibly from the minds and desires of two men.

An undercurrent of wonder gathered in him. Cosmium was still a great mystery; scientists had not yet agreed on exactly what it was, or on exactly how it produced its effects. It possessed a strange sort of radioactivity, for while it made its presence known on instruments designed to detect radioactivity, it seemed to bear no relation to the familiar radioactive elements. But scientists had worked wonders with such few bits of cosmium that had come into their hands; the element produced astonishing and almost supernatural results in the treatment of human ills.

Sprague jerked into alertness as Dagget suddenly gestured downward. He had been aware in a detached way that the jeet had reached the forest and was winging over its vast mottled expanse. He saw now that Dagget had sighted a group of children in a glade below, and he sent his hands over the controls, slowing the jeet and swinging it around.

The children were running in pursuit as before, a tiny trickle of life through the green and shadowed immobility of the forest; and as the jeet moved in a semi-circle through the blue-green sky, they stopped and stared upward with eager eyes, awaiting further developments. It was as though they had sighted a butterfly or a bird and were at once pleased and puzzled by its antics.

Sprague circled several times, while Dagget watched intently through the binoculars.

"Just the kids," Dagget announced at last. "No adults again, no weapons or other artifacts. This group looks like the same one we saw yesterday."

"We'll land, then," Sprague returned. "And I guess we'd better pick

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a spot far enough so the kids won't be in the way when we come down. They wouldn't know enough to avoid the jet stream."

HE SENT the craft skimming above the tops of the trees, and then, sighting a long clear aisle between the smooth brownish-green boles, he glided to a landing on the mossy turf. Preparing to leave the cabin, he reached into a compartment and took out a holstered automatic and belt.

"It might be a good idea to have a weapon handy," he said in answer to Dagget's glance. "On a world like this you never know what might happen."

"Maybe I ought to take one, too," Dagget said.

"One gun between us is all we'll need," Sprague said quietly. His eyes locked for a tight, bitter moment with those of the red-headed man.

Dagget shrugged. "All right, Captain."

Sprague buckled the automatic about his waist, gathered up his small case, and followed Dagget out of the jeet. The air in the forest was warm and had a spicy tang. There was a deep stillness, which was underscored without being quite broken by the plaintive rustling of leaves all around in a soft breeze.

Another sound rose above the rustling; the sound of voices. Down the shadowed aisle formed by the trees, running figures appeared. They approached swiftly, and soon they grew distinct as young boys and girls. They laughed and called as they ran, and their long hair flew and their slender arms tossed in unrestrained excitement.

They might, Sprague thought wryly, have been boys and girls on Earth, running to see a circus caravan that had just arrived. Only he and Dagget were not much of a circus. There was no humor in them—not with cosmium here. Sprague hoped the children would not be too disappointed.

Those foremost in the running band presently slowed to a stop. The others in the rear crowded into them until they too became motionless. Across a mossy gap of some twenty yards, the men and the children gazed solemnly at each other.

The children had a wild look. There were perhaps a score in the group. Their hair was long and tangled about their small flushed faces, and their naked slim bodies were brown and sinewy. With wide eyes and open mouths, curious and yet hesitant, they stared at the men.

Sprague walked forward slowly. The children stiffened; muscles corded in their slender legs as they tensed for flight.

Sprague smiled. "Hello," he said.

The smile seemed to touch the children like a tangible thing; it spread through them like a ripple. Answering smiles appeared on their faces, and a slight blonde girl echoed Sprague's greeting in an awkward voice.

"Hel-lo," she said.

The others around her laughed, reassured and delighted by the sound. "Hel-lo!" they said. "Hel-lo!"

The girl stepped closer, and as several of those nearest her moved to follow, the entire group was suddenly jostling and pushing as they swarmed about Sprague. They touched his coverall with exploring fingers, commenting on it in their clear shrill voices. Sprague could not understand them. There seemed a haunting familiarity in their words, but this might have been due to nothing more than the fact that they spoke in human tones.

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"You...you kids," Sprague said abruptly, with a gentle intensity. "Where is everybody else? Why are you all alone here? How...just how can this be?"

The small faces about him turned solemn. The children seemed perplexed and troubled by his tone. They glanced at each other, and for a moment there was an uneasy quiet.

Then swift movements were suddenly audible. The children stared at a point behind Sprague. Alarm shooting an icy-hot flash through him, he whirled.

Dagget was disappearing into the cabin of the jeet. As Sprague started forward the door closed with a muffled thud, and through the transalloy shell he saw Dagget hurry into a seat and send his hands darting over the controls. Then he realized that the jets were partly turned in his direction, and instantly he saw his danger. He flung himself to one side, shouting at the children and waving them away.

PERHAPS his harshly urgent voice frightened them, or perhaps they dimly understood; but they scampered to shelter among the surrounding trees. Moments later the jeet took off with a sibilant roar, diminishing swiftly in size as it shot upward into the blue-green sky.

Slowly Sprague emerged from behind the tree trunk where he had taken protection, staring after the jeet with a resigned bitterness. Then he dropped to a squatting position and opened the small case, which he had been keeping clutched under one arm. This contained, among other instruments, a tiny radio set and power unit. He sent out a call to Dagget, which would be picked up by the other's apparatus in the jeet.

"Ben! Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you," Dagget returned. "But it isn't going to do you any good."

"Just what kind of a space crazy trick do you think you're pulling?" Sprague demanded.

"Space crazy!" Dagget flashed back. "You're the one who wanted to turn our cosmium discovery over to the Federation. If that's the way you feel, you can stay right here on Hindemuth IV and think of all the fun you're going to miss. I'm taking the cruiser and hypering back to the System. I'll see you later—if you're still alive when I get back."

"Don't be a fool, Ben! You'll never get away with it. Headquarters will give you a thorough scanning over what became of me, and—"

"Headquarters will never touch me. I have the right kind of information, and I know the right kind of people. I'll get all the help I need."

Sprague sighed. "All right, Ben, now I'm going to let you in on a little secret. I've changed the frequency of the cruiser's hatch opening mechanism. You don't know what that new frequency is. If you use the wrong frequency in trying to get into the ship, you'll close a circuit that will set off the engines. The cruiser will take off for space without you—if, of course, you aren't killed by the blast. Remember, Ben, you can guess about the frequency—but you'll have to be right the first time."

Sprague's receiver made a strangled sound, then clicked into silence. He replaced the radio in the case and glanced around at the children, who had slowly approached to watch in puzzled wonder as he spoke to Dagget. They seemed wary and uncertain, as though not yet entirely over their fright. He smiled at them, a wry, tired

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smile, and then spoke.

"Hello again, kids. I guess we ought to get acquainted, since it appears I'm going to be with you for quite some time. What are your names? Mine's Phil Sprague."

The children said nothing. They smiled back at him, and one of them laughed softly, a glad, comforted sound.

TWO DAYS passed. Sprague remained in the forest with the children. He did not know to what lengths desperation might drive Dagget, and there was protection among the trees.

The children seemed delighted with his presence, as though finding in him the fulfillment of some long-felt need. They never strayed far from him, and they watched him anxiously whenever he moved. They followed like so many small frisking shadows, pulling and shoving for the opportunity to be closest at his side, as growing restlessness drove him into aimless walks through the forest.

Food was no problem for Sprague. The children brought fruits and nuts from the forest, and cup-shaped leaves filled with a sweet, milk-like sap. His tests told him that these were edible and nourishing enough, and he knew he could subsist in this fashion for an indefinite period—longer, at any rate, than Dagget, whose only provisions were a kit of emergency rations in the jeet.

The children spent the still, deep nights wherever they happened to be in the forest. They would gather leafy boughs and make mattresses of these, curling up on them, like puppies, in groups of three or more. Sprague's comforting nearness was as usual eagerly sought, and he found he did not mind. He felt a kind of bond growing between the children and himself; he was beginning to know them as individuals, to sense the thoughts behind their childish, simple speech. And oddly, concern with Dagget, with the cosmium find, began to recede in his thoughts like problems of another and entirely different existence.

But he was not allowed completely to forget. In the morning of the third day he caught sight of the jeet, far in the sky, cruising over a distant part of the forest. He cautioned the children to remain out of sight beneath the largest trees. He made them understand, and they were quickly amenable, seeing it as a game.

After that he hovered over the radio set, waiting. A few hours later he heard Dagget's voice, heavy with a note of desperation.

"Phil! Are you listening, Phil? I want to talk to you."

"I'm listening," Sprague said. "What's on your mind, Ben?"

"Phil, where are you? We can't go on like this. We've got to get together and talk this over."

"There's nothing to talk over, Ben. I don't see any compromise on this cosmium situation. We can use the discovery your way or my way, but not both at once... And I think my way is best, Ben. When you're ready to agree, I'll tell you how to find me."

Dagget was silent for a long while. Then his radio clicked off.

Sprague sighed and stared emptily into the forest. He felt a touch on his arm; he found himself looking into the worried eyes of the slight blonde girl, whose name seemed to be Karreh. He grinned and rumpled her hair, and as she shrieked her delight, he picked up the case and rose, knowing that Dagget might very well have used the radio contact in order to obtain a directional fix. He and the

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children would have to move to a new spot, and quickly.

He gestured and called to them, using a few of the simple words he had learned. Then he trotted into the shadowed green maze of the forest, and the children followed, laughing and frolicking.

Sprague traveled, with occasional stops for rest, well into the afternoon. The children seemed tireless as they romped through the trees and the undergrowth, their laughing voices weaving an ever-changing pattern of sound. They ate as they went, snatching up the fruits and nuts which were present everywhere in abundance and gathering leaf-cups of milk-like sap during the rest periods.

SPRAGUE himself was not a little surprised to find that he felt no serious fatigue effects. He seemed filled with a youthful vigor almost as boundless as that possessed by the children themselves. It was as though the days he had spent in the forest had given him a new strength and endurance.

The forest gradually thinned out and at last Sprague realized that he and the children had been moving toward one edge of it. He was in doubt about leaving the shelter of the trees, but curiosity impelled him to see what lay ahead. Further, he sensed it might be wise to seek concealment in some less obvious location, one less likely to be searched by an increasingly desperate Dagget.

Sprague paused often to scan the blue-green sky. It was still cloudless, still serene and empty of life. The jeet had not been visible since that morning, and somehow that worried Sprague. He suspected a stratagem on Dagget's part; the other had not resumed radio contact as he would have done in the event that he had realized the hopelessness of his position and decided to give up.

At last Sprague and the children passed beyond the forest's edge and reached the lip of a broad gulley where a large stream had once coursed and where now only a thin trickle of water crept. Some change in the land, it seemed, had dammed the stream and sent it flowing in a new direction. Only the gulley and the thin trickle within it remained.

Finding a way down to the gulley floor, Sprague descended. The children scrambled after him, laughing and unhesitating, agile as mountain goats. They did not understand the sense of peril that drove Sprague; this was an adventure to them, and he was content to let it remain so.

After another short rest, he chose a direction at random and resumed the march, keeping well within the shadows to one side of the gulley walls. In this way, a short time later, he came to an obstruction. A landslide or a cave-in brought down the gulley wall at this point, filling the channel almost from one side to the other.

Sprague was studying the huge mound of gravel and sand, when he saw a gleam of curved metal. He stared at it for a long moment, stunned and disbelieving, a wonder kindling and becoming a vast flame in his mind. Then he was running crazily, clawing his way up the mound, tearing away great handfuls of sand and gravel.

A few seconds later he was certain that he had found the long-lost Colonial Administration ship.

He continued to dig. The children scrambled up the mound to help him, and he motioned to direct their activities. They jostled and laughed, and their slender arms swung as they sent

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handfuls of debris in a steady shower through the air.

Sprague laughed, too. For this was the answer to the stalemate between Dagget and himself; this was the means of victory. It was Dagget who would now be marooned on Hindemuth IV, since he would meet with immediate frustration in any attempt to enter the cruiser.

Sprague, however, had a ship—if it had not been too damaged to be placed in operation. The possibility sobered him.

He speculated on how the vessel had come to be here. Originally, no doubt, it had been landed in a spot above the gulley. Later there had been a cave-in of the supporting earth, caused either by the weight of the ship, or by some process of erosion. The vessel had tumbled into the gulley, becoming partially buried. It had not been visible from the air, not even to the all-embracing eye of the jeet's camera.

IT WAS ONE of the children who presently discovered the entrance hatch, and Sprague hurried over from the place where he had been digging. The hatch was open but partially filled with sand, and more digging was necessary before he could enter. Finally he groped his way into the darkness and silence of the ship's interior. The children trooped after him, subdued and quiet with wonder.

He was familiar with the design of this type of ship, and soon he located an emergency light switch station. The lights worked; illumination flooded the stairways and corridors of that immediate section. He found other stations, and a quickening pulse of life now stirred in the vessel's metal carcass.

With the children following in awed muteness, Sprague hurried through the deserted corridors, pausing to glance into compartments as he went. There were no signs of tragedy, nothing to show that there had been an attack, mutiny or sickness. No remains of bodies were visible anywhere; the compartments were clean and neat, giving no evidence of damage or theft. The ship's passengers seemed simply to have left. And they had left very quietly and calmly, it seemed, taking nothing, disturbing nothing.

Sprague found the captain's cabin, where he at once fixed his attention on the ship's log. But this did not explain what had become of the passengers and crew. The landing on Hindemuth IV had been made safely, and subsequent entries mentioned nothing more momentous than the fact that cosmium had been reported present on the island. The last entry had been made a week after landing, and discussed only the steps that were being taken to settle the colonists in their new habitat.

The rest was silence. The captain had not again touched the log. Sprague sent a slow glance around the cabin and uneasily wondered why.

He went to the control room. Here again were silence and emptiness. There were no signs of disorder or damage. A glance at the meters and gauges above the pilot's console showed that the reactor furnace had been properly deactivated. A supply of radioactive fuels remained in storage, and automatic devices would easily assemble them to power the Hyper-Drive generators.

He tried the switches and buttons on the console; colored signal lights blinked in response. The ship was still in operating condition. It had not been harmed by the fall into the gulley, having been designed to withstand stresses even more serious.

Sprague was satisfied. Everything was ready. He had only to—.

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He peered around the control room, puzzled. He had a sudden, overpowering feeling of disorientation. He could not remember how or why he happened to be here. The severely utilitarian room seemed strange. He felt that he should be somewhere else entirely; he could not decide where this was. The memories he sought eluded him; they hovered tantalizingly far back in his mind, flirting on the brink of awareness, but never crossing it.

He squeezed his eyes shut, standing very still. Somewhere beyond the control room children laughed and children's footsteps pattered through the corridors. And as though dissolved by the sounds, his queer amnesia was gone.

Foreboding remained. He knew that inexplicable sensation would return, for this was not the first time he had experienced it. There had been other instances of late when he had noticed a vagueness in his thoughts, when he had felt his memories becoming dim and unreal. Only now the feeling seemed to be growing in frequency and depth.

He heard the children laugh again, heard their footsteps approach. He turned slowly from the pilot console —and saw Dagget in the control room doorway.

Shock thundered through Sprague. He reached for the automatic in the holster at his side; he became motionless as he saw that Dagget's own weapon was already centered with lethal readiness on his chest.

A GROUP of children had preceded Dagget into the room, their small faces showing delight over his return. But now, as they grew aware of the tense, hostile expressions of the two men, their smiles faded. They stood frozen, sensing that the situation was not quite right, but puzzled over the reason.

"Why don't you go for your gun, Phil?" Dagget asked softly. "I wouldn't mind killing you—not after what I've gone through. I'm going to kill you anyhow, you know."

Sprague was staring at the red-headed man. Dagget seemed queerly changed.

"So you traced me here, Ben," Sprague said at last. His voice was bemused; his mind was not on Dagget but on a matter even more important. A pattern, previously bewildering, was now becoming clear.

Dagget smiled thinly. "I got a directional fix on my last radio contact with you. I landed and then used radar to locate the route you and the kids were taking through the forest. I set out after you. I caught up just as you were crawling into the ship."

Sprague's thoughts had a diamond-sharp clarity. Dagget went on, his voice stronger and harsher, yet still he seemed to speak from a distance.

"You kept me from getting the cruiser, Phil—but you aren't going to keep me from getting *this* ship. I've seen enough to be certain it's in working order. I'm going back to the System with my information about the cosmium here—and I'm going back alone."

Sprague shook his head slowly. "You're not going back, Ben."

"Are you going to stop me?"

"No," Sprague said. "Something else is going to stop you, Ben. The cosmium here is going to do that."

"You're crazy! How could cosmium possibly—?" Dagget broke off, blinking, as though to clear an obstructing mist from his eyes. He rubbed the back of his gunhand over his forehead, looking dazed and puzzled. He

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seemed to have forgotten the weapon he was holding.

"Cosmium," Sprague said, fighting to keep his new-found clarity from becoming lost. "Cosmium is at the bottom of everything. I should have guessed it before, but it became clear only a moment ago—too late, Ben... too late."

Dagget blinked, and desperately Sprague went on:

"Ben...listen. You've got to understand everything I say. There isn't much time left—I can feel it.

"Ben, cosmium has a powerful effect on life. Scientists back in the System have already learned that much in experiments with small amounts of it. Small amounts—and you and I have been exposed to a greater concentration than has ever existed in any one time and place. As a result one certain effect has become clear: continued exposure to unusually large amounts of cosmium results in a steady reduction or dissipation of bodily mass—most likely as energy. In human beings there is a curious kind of physical regression. I suspect that this reaches equilibrium according to the amount of cosmium to which the body is exposed.

"You've noticed that there is no animal life here, Ben. Because of the highly specialized type of cellular organization needed, animal life never got the chance to evolve. Cosmium made that impossible."

Dagget looked dully confused and uneasy. "You must be losing your mind," he muttered.

SPRAGUE nodded gravely. "I *am* losing my mind, Ben—and so are you. Just as the colonists lost their minds. A short time after they landed, something happened to them. They... *forgot*. They left the ship and never came back. They simply forgot all about it... Because, you see, in a dissipation of bodily mass the cells are affected, and in the brain this means a loss of memories—amnesia."

"You're trying to trick me!" Dagget whispered. "But it isn't going to work. I'm hypering back to the System in this ship, and you aren't going to stop me. I...I'm going to kill you. *Now*...."

The weapon in Dagget's hand moved to point squarely at Sprague. Dagget's finger tightened on the trigger.

"Look at your uniform, Ben," Sprague said. "It's getting too big for you. We've been here almost a week, you know. That was long enough for the cosmium radiations to start working on us."

Dagget looked down at his coverall. He plucked at it, forgetting the weapon in his hand. It fell to the floor.

Dagget smiled in puzzled wonder at Sprague. "Why, it *is* too big!"

The feeling of disorientation swept once more over Sprague. He had been keeping it at bay, but his massive effort of will had finally weakened. He made a tremendous last attempt to drive the dimness back.

"I've got to leave a message before ...before I forget. I've got to... If only— I...."

The last attempt failed.

"Too big," Dagget said. He laughed. He stripped the coverall from him and tossed it aside. "I'm hungry," he said.

"There's plenty of good things to eat in the forest," Sprague said. He grinned and hurried impulsively toward the doorway. "Let's eat!"

The watching children laughed. The strangeness of the past several minutes was gone. Everything was all right again. They shouted and called to each other and followed the two

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bigger children through the ship, through the hatch, and into the gentle dusk outside.

Laughing, jostling, the children ran toward the forest which was home. Among them now were two larger and older than the others. But time and cosmium would take care of the differences. Soon all the children would be the same...

URANIUM AND POWER!

By H. R. STANTON

A COUPLE of experts in the fields of both ordinary electrical power and atomic power, have written a book for experts called the "Economic Aspects of Atomic Power". They've gone over the subject with a fine-toothed comb and they've arrived at some interesting conclusions.

Electrical energy from coal costs about four-tenths of a cent per kilowatt-hour. This is true for a good portion of the world. It is a very, very cheap rate. Can atomic energy compete with this? Can electricity from an atomically powered electrical plant beat this? The authors say both yes and no. Under certain circumstances, atomic power which costs a few tenths of a cent more, can beat out coal.

The first and most important fact is that uranium is in limited supply. This means that unless the method of breeding new radioactives (which is almost a certainty and even now shows great promise) is perfected, coal will remain king. In addition, atomic energy isn't likely to be competitive in highly industrialized nations like the U.S., Britain and Germany, because they already have an enormous investment in coal-fired electrical plants, an investment which cannot be discarded overnight.

Thus, we are likely to see the use of atomic energy first in nations which lack coal—as in Brazil and Argentina—and secondly in coal-rich nations like the United States and Russia which have vast areas and could use electrical power in linking them, even going so far as electrifying the railroads!

Should the "breeding-process" for uranium and radioactives work out exceedingly well, perhaps electrical power will cost effectively *nothing!* If this is the case, we can have electricity replace even home-heating! This would not be a matter of economy as much as it would be one of convenience.

The future is still unstable but it can be safely predicted within the next fifteen or twenty years a fair number of atomic-electric plants will appear all over the world.

PACKET - X200 . . .

By JUNE LURIE

INDICATING a new development in aircraft transportation is the new experimental aircraft being tested by the Army, the Packet X-200, which promises to change the future of aerial transportation. The plane, which may be eventually equipped with jet engines, springs from a fundamental economic fact, which lies at the basis of all mechanical transportation: as long as an airplane is on the ground—not flying—it is losing money! Any machine which is not in use, which is idle, no matter for what purpose, is losing money also and is inefficient into the bargain.

Therefore, reasoned the designers of the new plane, why can't we build a cargo plane with a detachable fuselage? The minute the main structure of the plane lands, it detaches this separate "pod" picks up a new one, already loaded, and is back in the air. The new X-200 behaves almost exactly like a truck-trailer combination which is so common today because of its efficiency. The designers did this exactly when they turned out the X-200.

It is an ungainly looking aircraft, but its function is perfect. Instead of wasting precious hours on the ground being loaded by crewmen, its "pod"—the large capacious fuselage, is already full—and is neatly attached to the engine and flying section—the cab, you might say—of the plane. No time wasted, no fuss. The Air Force and the Army are mad about the idea. As major users of aerial transport, they find it a perfect solution to moving large amounts of material without loss of time over tremendous distances—and with modest ground facilities.

Undoubtedly the idea will be extended to civil aviation. And we can already see, without particularly straining our imaginations, that it will probably be used in rocketry, when the time comes. When rocketry reaches the stage of development that permits numerous trips and requires material for say a Lunar base, it is easy to suppose that regular rockets may have attached to them, "pods" like these, extra fuselages loaded with equipment. Certainly the idea isn't at all fantastic!

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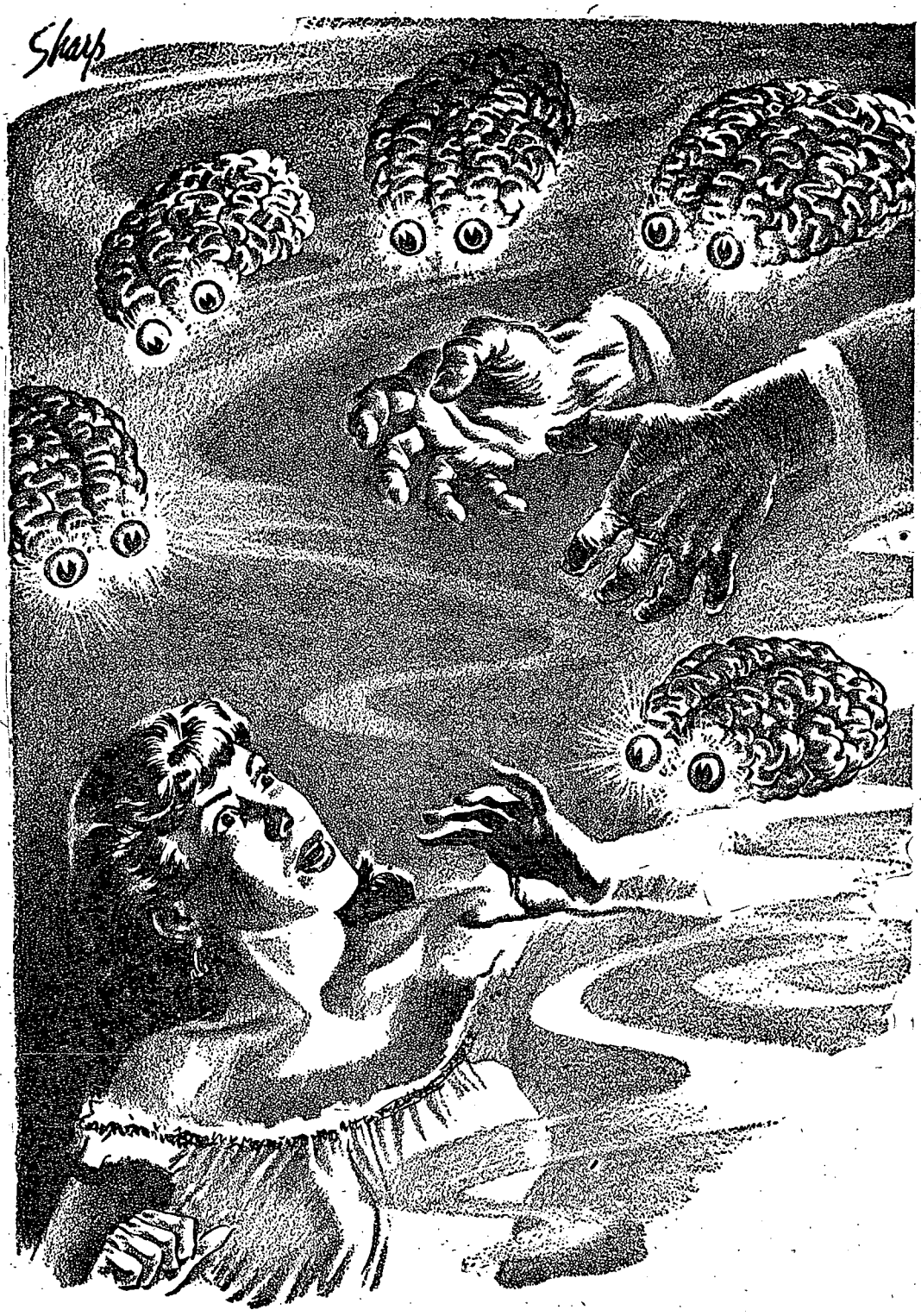

Wherever she looked, Fred's eyes were studying her, his hands reaching for her

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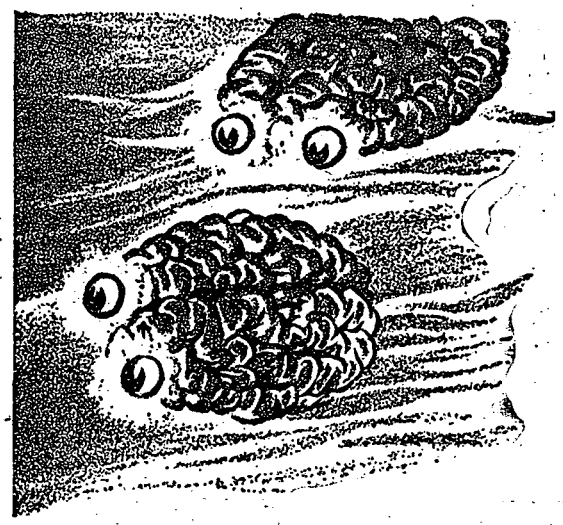

She had killed Fred to get him out of the way, not knowing that science had found a way to make use even of the dead!

A MATTER of PRINCIPLE

By E. K. Jarvis

SHE PLUCKED a final hair from the delicate arc of her brow and took a last look at herself in the vanity mirror, thinking: Still beautiful, but the lines are beginning to show. Ten years of marriage and all I've got from them are lines. They either shouldn't allow you to marry at seventeen, or they should make divorce easier.

But it wasn't the years, and it wasn't marriage. It was frustration, the wanting so much and having so little, that turned the softness hard, inside and out.

"Eight-thirty, Jan!" Fred yelled from the kitchen. "Coffee's on."

Fred. Her sweet red lips formed an ugly word. Her husband, the millstone around her neck. Maybe if she hadn't met Fred, she'd have gone to work at Agret and Price anyway, and then she and Roy—

"Jan!"

"I heard you," she said.

As she walked to the kitchen, she wondered who he thought he was kidding with that cheerful tone. Cheerful Fred, the man everyone liked. The man whose wife had to work so she could have some decent clothes and a respectable address.

The coffee was in the cups, Fred already at the tiny table as she came in. He looked up at her, and some of the cheerfulness went out of his face.

"Pretty slick," he said, not meaning it pleasantly, and dropped his eyes.

"Thanks," Jan said, not meaning it either.

He was even less cheerful now. He was digging at his left ear with the little finger of his left hand. It was a habit he had, a habit that irritated her.

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"He picking you up this morning?"

Fred meant her boss, Roy Price, but he would never mention Roy's name. He had another habit, though, whenever there was talk of Roy. He would lean forward, his eyes wide, and regard her unblinkingly.

"Why should this morning be any different?" Jan asked. "Besides, his stopping by for me and taking me home every day saves us eight dollars a month on fares. That ought to make you happy."

He got up and started walking around the room, his shoulders hunched in the curious way he had developed lately. Jan hated that stooping, hunching of the shoulders; Fred had stopped looking good to her a long time ago, but seeing him this way always turned dislike to loathing.

"Why can't you take the Commuters' with me?" he demanded.

"And get trampled and shoved and airsick? And come to the office looking like a wreck?"

He whirled on her. "Don't give me that! Who do you think you're fooling?"

And now, he was doing all three of those loathsome things at once. He was hunching, digging at his ear, and staring at her as though his eyes could see into her brain.

"I know what's going on, all right. And I'm warning you, Jan. I may not have much pride left, but there's only so much I'll take. You and that boss of yours better watch your steps, or I'll raise a stench that'll make him forget that perfume you wear!"

At that moment, the landing roof buzzer went off. A voice said, "Mr. Price's 'copter has just landed."

The force went out of Fred, and he stood there looking not like a handsome man of thirty, which he was, but like a man of fifty, with fifty hard years on his shoulders.

"Jan," he said miserably. "Jan, why do we have to go through this? Give up the job."

"Sure. Give up the job and move to a cheaper place and wash your shirts, and maybe in twenty years we'll have enough to buy a second hand 'copter of our own!"

In a rage, she rushed from the apartment, slamming the door behind her. All the way up to the landing roof, she carried the picture in her mind of Fred picking at his ear.

THIS WAS the wonderful part of her day, this coming out on the roof and seeing Roy waiting for her. And his chauffeur holding the door open, and the helicopter costing as much as Fred earned in ten years.

And this was also the hardest part of her day, because she was so close to something she could almost have, but not quite.

And then, as if she didn't know: "Why are you looking at me so strangely, Roy?"

"Lord," he breathed. "Every time I see you, I wonder again at how beautiful you are." He sniffed. "You're wearing that perfume again. That—what's it called?"

"Your's Alone," Jan said. And looked into his eyes.

Then, they were rising high above the suburban center where she and Fred lived, with its upper middle class shops and its upper middle class apartments, and its total atmosphere of higher priced mediocrity.

And this was another wonderful part of Jan's day. The table was set in Roy's cabin and he was helping her into her chair, his lips almost touching the spun copper of her hair.

Roy was almost fifty but he looked nearer thirty. He was one of New York's most successful lawyers. The bud vase on the table was solid sil-

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ver, and the material of Roy's suit was like silk.

"Brioche," Roy said. "You said you liked them. There's a place in Paris that makes them wonderfully well, so I had some flown over for breakfast this morning."

And there they were on the table, looking so flaky and light that she didn't have to taste them to know how good they were.

She half turned, tilting her head, so that suddenly her face and Roy's were only a fraction of an inch apart.

"You're sweet," she whispered. "Sweet, thoughtful..."

He couldn't help himself. Her lips were an invitation he could not refuse. She let him have just enough to make him want more, and then pushed him away.

"Roy," she murmured. "Roy, I can't. I'm—"

"You're married. I know. Forgive me, Jan."

"Roy, you don't know what this is doing to me. Having to live with Fred, and all the while..." Her eyes grew moist, appealing. "What can I do, Roy?"

"Nothing," he said. "That's the hell of it. The courts recognize only one excuse for divorce. I can't ask you to give Fred that excuse."

He said, "Jan, you're very young. I'm an experienced man. I can see where this is going to lead us, even if you can't. And I love you too much to hurt you."

There was a cold lump in Jan's stomach. He was going to be noble. She could almost hear the words before he said them.

"Jan, I think it would be for your best interests to leave Agret and Price. If you were free, I'd marry you tomorrow. Since I can't marry you..."

Since he couldn't marry her, he was giving her up. He was being noble! But what he didn't know was that Jan wasn't giving him up.

In her mind was already the knowledge of what she had to do.

LATER IN the day, there were times when her resolution wavered. She took a letter and left Roy's office, feeling his eyes on her and knowing exactly how she looked in the tight fitting dress. And knowing he was fifty, with too many years of no-play behind him, with a bulge here and there it took a good tailor to conceal.

And thinking: Money can do things. He knows people, the right people. He'll find a way.

But at five o'clock, he called her into his office and said, "I can't take you home today, Jan. I'm going to be busy for a while."

She said, "Oh? All right, Roy."

"Yes." He templed his pudgy fingers, not looking at her. "I'm taking tonight's rocket to Luna City. Be gone for a week."

"All right, Roy."

Only it wasn't all right. She smiled as she left the office, but while the elevator shot her up to the landing roof, her face grew set.

The elevator was packed. On the landing roof, a crowd of men and women tensed as the Commuters' dropped. They surged forward, lifting Jan and carrying her with them.

Inside the huge 'copter, it was worse. All the seats were taken and she had to stand. The man on her left ogled her brazenly, the man on her right pretended to read his paper as his body swayed against hers.

And this would be every day, twice a day.

"Greenhaven!" the conductor called.

Jan said, "Out, please," and all the way down the aisle she felt the elbows and the eyes.

Fred stared at her as she came into the apartment. She knew what he was

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thinking. She was later than usual, and she was mussed.

"I took the Commuters'," she said. It was almost funny, the way the relief flooded up into his eyes.

"The Mangle," Fred said, using the name a million commuters used.

She said, "Fred, you were right. I'm giving up my job. This is my last week."

Jan could almost hear the thoughts running through his mind. He wanted to believe it, yet he was afraid to believe it.

And he was so happy, he looked positively stupid.

She let him throw his arms around her, let him kiss her, even made a show of response.

"This calls for a celebration," Fred laughed. "Dinner out."

"No. Just the two of us, Fred. Like it used to be."

They set the table together. While the steaks tubed up from the building freezer, Fred made a salad dressing. He was walking on air, even forgetting to hunch his shoulders.

But the rest of the pattern refused to change. All through dessert, he stared at her unblinkingly. And afterward, sitting in the living room while the dishwasher whirled the dishes dry and stacked them away, his little finger was busy in his left ear.

She said, "Fred, you know that picture of us? I wish you'd hang it."

Happily, he jumped up and raced out to the service closet for the ladder. Happily for her, too. She was holding tight to herself, knowing that if she wavered she was lost.

"Here?" Fred pointed. He was high on the ladder, the hammer and a nail in his hands.

"Fine," Jan said. "Wait, Fred. Don't use a nail; it cracks the plaster. I'll get the screwdriver."

Before he could say he'd get it himself, she was off. She picked the screw carefully, choosing one with a five-slot head. The screwdriver was long, coming to a sharp point.

"Here," she said, "dear."

She was standing below him, not holding the screwdriver high enough. Smiling into her eyes, Fred came down one step, his hands holding the sides of the ladder.

With all her strength, she drove the point up into his throat.

And then, knowing it would take the neighbors five minutes to break down the locked door, she screamed.

"IT'S TOO bad the door was locked," the detective said. "He might have had a chance. Or if maybe you hadn't fainted."

The rug around his feet was the color of dark cherries, still damp. She didn't have to pretend now. The sick feeling was real enough.

"Go over it again, will you please?" the detective said.

She went over it again, the way Fred had turned, the way his foot had slipped, the way he had fallen. And then the gap until she had come to her senses with all that pounding at the door.

"Yeah," a young man said. He was the coroner's assistant. "Here's the slip marks on the rung."

He looked at the detective and the detective said, "Yeah, I guess that's it all right. One of those things. All right, Mrs. Molson, coroner's inquest tomorrow. We'll let you know the time."

"What about—?" She pointed dumbly at the sheet covered figure on the floor.

"Whatever you want," the young man said. "We've got our pictures and everything else we need. I'll give you a certificate for cremation if you'd like."

"All right," she said.

"Or better yet, why not let the

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Bank have your husband's body?"

"The Bank?"

"Human Parts Reserve Bank. I gave him a shot of preservative, and if they get here fast, they can still use him."

He was a very earnest young man, an earnest doctor. He said, "I know it seems cruel, perhaps, but think of it this way, Mrs. Molson. Cremated, your husband is gone forever. Through the Bank, he may do a great deal of good. His eyes may give a living man sight, his ears may give another hearing."

She knew about the Bank, with its gruesome parts neatly stored. Here the arms, there the legs, the frozen tissues, the frozen nerves, even the gray brains in the brimming tanks, waiting to think again. The thought was making her sick.

"I know," the young man said. "I know how you feel. But at least—"

"Yes," she said. "I think Fred would like it that way. He was always doing good. He loved people."

"That's wonderful," the young man said. "You'll feel better for this, Mrs. Molson."

ACTUALLY, she didn't feel too badly. The inquest went off well. Roy was unable to get back in time, but Agret came down to help, and found it unnecessary to help at all.

She'd been fortunate, Jan discovered, in taking up the young doctor's suggestion about the Bank. It was one of those intangibles that threw a lot of weight on her side. The fact that she hadn't persisted in having Fred cremated, was in her favor.

Accidental death was the verdict.

Only one thing to worry about, and that was the matter of how Roy would take this.

And that worry, too, was dispelled when Roy took her hands in his own and told her he knew what she must have gone through. There was no doubt of her in his eyes.

"It must have been dreadful," he said.

"I thought I'd lose my mind. I felt so—so alone. Fred gone and you away. There was no one..."

"There is now. For as long as you need me." Roy swallowed hard. "I know this sounds awful, coming so soon, but I want you to keep working here. And then, when the shock has worn off, we can talk about something I said once—that if you were free, I'd marry you."

Her relief was so great that she began to tremble. Roy put his arms around her to comfort her. Everything was all right; there was nothing to worry about.

THEY WERE married six months later by a justice of the Supreme Court who was a friend of Roy's. It was a small wedding, but the stones in the ring Roy gave Jan made up for it by being very large.

"You name it," Roy had said, referring to their honeymoon, and quick as a flash, Jan had said, "Luna City."

To Luna City they went. And for once in her life, Jan knew the thrill of being able to ask for what she wanted, and of getting it.

They stayed at a hotel cabin with a plexiglass roof, and the brilliance of the Lunar nights was almost close enough to touch. They toured the craters in a vac-car. They rode the tubes beneath the surface and watched fifty-dollar-a-day miners dig for precious metals.

And after they returned to Earth, there was the excitement of redecorating Roy's penthouse and furnishing it to suit a feminine taste. And shopping in Paris was only an hour away if you could afford the Atlantic rocket.

"It's a dream," Jan said. "I'm so

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happy and I'm so afraid, afraid I'll wake up."

Roy laughed. "It's I who am dreaming. I still can't believe it."

He led her out to the edge of the parapet and they looked down on the lights of the city, like clusters of jewels below them. "It's beautiful," Jan whispered.

"I never thought so. But until now, I've always looked at it alone."

The time was ripe. She said, "That little cluster there looks just like a brooch I saw at Cartier's today."

"Did you buy it?"

"No. It cost a furtune."

"How much?" Roy asked.

She told him and he whistled softly. "A fortune is right."

"But it was beautiful," Jan sighed. "It has three matched emeralds just the color of my eyes."

And the next afternoon, Cartier's delivered a package. Holding the brooch close to her face, Jan saw that the emeralds really did match her eyes.

IN SUMMER they went to Canada, to Switzerland, and that winter they spent on Roy's estate in Jamaica. And now when Jan looked in the mirror she thought: the other was just a dream, a bad dream. This is the reality.

Sometimes, she tossed in her sleep, but not often.

And when she saw Roy's reflection in the mirror, she did not even smile at the little round paunch. That had been part of the bargain.

Once in a while, of course, she thought: he could cut it down. He could be a decent dancer if he tried. It would be nice to have some friends who were younger.

Worst of all, though, was the discovery that there were people who had a great deal more money than Roy ever could possess.

"Made any plans for the weekend?" Roy asked. He'd just come out of the shower, his robe flapping around his short legs.

"No. Why?"

"Jack Crawford wants us to come up. Thought we'd motor for a change. Connecticut's beautiful this time of year."

"That would be nice," Jan said, not meaning it.

"Just the two of us," Roy said.

"That would be nice."

Only it wouldn't be nice. Both Jack and Millie Crawford were bores. And it didn't matter how much jewelry Jan wore, Millie always outshone her. But Jack was the chairman of Consolidated Rocket and one of Roy's best clients.

They never refused an invitation from the Crawfords.

The strange thing was that Roy didn't seem to mind them. Swinging the big convertible around a cloverleaf and onto the concrete ribbon that unrolled into the countryside, he said, "We'll have fun, darling."

"I hope," Jan said.

Roy glanced at her. "You don't like Millie, do you?"

She didn't feel like lying. "She's always looking down her long nose at me."

"That's just her way," Roy laughed. He dropped speed, letting the car idle along at eighty miles an hour. "Millie's family is one of the few that had money before the boom of '67, and she can't forget it."

Jan snorted and Roy said, "She'd give everything she's got if she could look like you in that green mink."

"Hah!" Jan said. "When she's got one of the four white chinchillas in the world?"

"So that's it," Roy murmured.

"Well, why shouldn't I want one?"

"But darling, two hundred thousand for a coat—"

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"If you loved me in the right way—"

"Darling!"

He reached out and slid his arm around her and she twisted away. "Let me alone!"

The sudden movement pulled him off balance, and suddenly the car was flying up the bank of the road, Roy trying desperately to fight the wheel back. Everything was movement and flashes of light and the pressure of her safety belt as they crashed.

THIS WAS not Fred Molson. This was Roy Price. The ambulance was a miniature hospital, complete with whole blood, purifiers, artificial heart. Ahead of it, the airlanes cleared like magic, and New York was only three minutes away.

"He'll be all right," the doctor said soothingly. "Here, you take one of these pills, Mrs. Price."

"No," Jan said. "I don't need it."

She didn't need it. There wasn't a scratch on her. She had not lost consciousness for an instant, had even been able to switch on the emergency transmitter.

She was strong. But she couldn't bring herself to look at Roy. His face was all red and covered with tiny quills of glass from the windshield, and behind his right ear there was a jagged sliver driven deep. The rest of him was under a sheet that was turning as red as his face.

Against the background of a sudden wave of nausea, she heard the doctor talking to Roy's personal physician on the radio. And over their voices, a third one coming in.

"Becker?" Roy's doctor said. "They got you. Good. There'll be a police escort at the field."

"Bank alerted?" Becker asked.

"His measurements are going through now. They'll be ready when we are."

"Good. Extent of injuries, please."

The rest faded into a blur of medical terminology. It sounded like a dictionary of anatomy, there were so many of those words. Roy was alive only technically.

Then, the ambulance had stopped. The landing roof of the hospital was alive with white gowned figures that swarmed over the 'copter before its propellers had made their last revolution.

"Easy. Easy now," Roy's doctor said. The white figures and a white cart vanished into an elevator.

Everything was moving so fast, Jan thought. She felt dazed, like someone trying to watch all the wheels and cogs of a machine in motion. A perfect machine.

And suddenly the thought: too perfect. They'll pull him through.

LATER SHE sat in a beautifully decorated room across from the operating amphitheatre and told the story of the crash to the police. It was a simple story; Roy had turned his head while he put his arm around her and had lost control of the car.

The police wrote it all down and went away.

An interne took her blood pressure and asked if she wanted a pill. She refused the pill.

There was the whoosh of cartridges being tubed through the walls, and the steady swish of rubber tires as the carts wheeled into the operating room with sealed cans and jars.

And after an hour, Roy's doctor came out and crossed the corridor to where she sat. Jan jerked her head up.

"Dr. Tripp. Is it—is it all over?"

"Over? No, no. They're just getting started. Nothing for me to do, so I came out to see how you were."

He patted her shoulder and sat down beside her. "Your husband will be all right, Mrs. Price. Don't you

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worry. We've got the finest team of surgeons in the country working on him."

He said, "Lucky I knew Becker was in Nashville and that Consolidated has a plant there. They flew him up. They don't come better than Becker. He invented the brain graft, you know."

"You mean they'll have to—"

"Transplant? Probably. But that's up to Dr. Becker."

"But Roy's arm, and his face, and—"

He was an older man, with white hair and a pink scalp. He patted her shoulder again, definitely a fatherly gesture.

"That's what the Bank is for, my dear. Whatever is necessary will be supplied, from a tiny nerve to a new heart, if need be."

Rising, he said, "Well, I've talked enough. In cases like this—so much repair and replacement—we prefer not to disclose the extent or details of the work, beyond the obvious. Because the information, passed on to the patient, may cause needless worry, you see."

Most of his patients were not aware of it, but Dr. Tripp's smile was one of the things included in his large bills. It was warm, sincere, assured and heartening.

"He'll be as good as new, as good as he ever was."

THE TROUBLE was, Jan decided later, that Dr. Tripp's statement had contradicted itself. Roy might be as good as he had been, but he was definitely not as good as new.

After six months, he still spent half his time in bed, the other half sunning himself on the terrace. It would be six months more before he could return to his office.

If there were any great change immediately apparent, it was the change in Roy's attitude toward his wife. With others he was cheerful; alone with her he lapsed into long, watchful silences.

Twice she had mentioned the accident, and twice Roy turned his back on her. After that, Jan stuck to matters with less emotional charge. Even those subjects brought forth no pleasant response.

She was stuck, stuck with a man of fifty who was acting more than his age.

"You seem concerned," Dr. Tripp said to her after one of his weekly examinations of his patient.

Jan looked past him; Roy was lying back in bed, resting.

"He's been acting strangely," she said. "Not like himself."

"He isn't fully himself," the doctor said, smiling. "This is going to take a while."

"But he acts so old. He used to carry himself erect; now he slouches, as though he's always tired."

"I should say that's quite to be expected."

"I know, but there were things he used to like to talk about, things that interested him—"

"And now they don't," the doctor finished for her. "That, too, is natural. We've discovered that where work has been done on a person's brain, there is a temporary loss of memory. You'll find that as time goes on, his mind will clear and he will have full remembrance of events preceding the accident."

He patted her shoulder. "Time, my dear. In time he will have full recall, in time the new hand and arm will seem like they've always belonged to him, in time all the new factors will be assimilated."

He smiled as he left. "That's all, just a matter of time."

Sure, just a matter of time. Just a matter of spending days and weeks

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and years with a man who hated you, with an older man you'd never loved. Just time, until you too were old and the money didn't mean a thing.

Unless... Jan smiled thinly at the closing door. She didn't need a doctor. She needed a lawyer.

SITTING IN the office where she had once been an employee, Jan thought: I wish I knew someone else to go to. But there isn't anyone else as good. And this is costing him plenty of money.

Agret came through the connecting door from his own office, startling her. "I'm sorry," he said. He was Roy's age, but taller, darker, his movements quick and nervous. "How are you, Jan?"

"Fine," she said, relaxing again. "You, Martin?"

"All right. Busy as the devil, of course."

"It has been hard on you, hasn't it? All of Roy's work, plus your own."

Agret eyed her. "Well, being a man's partner is something like being his wife."

"Still—" Jan began.

"Sure, it's difficult." He was definitely wondering now. "But Roy would do the same for me."

"Of course. That is, Roy would."

"What?" Agret sat up straighter. "What are you getting at, Jan?"

She let a long minute slide past, arranging the words in her mind. "Well," she said at last, "I think I feel about Roy as you do. Maybe more so, as far as loyalty and love are concerned. We'd both do anything in our power for Roy."

"Granted," he said.

"But that's based, as you yourself said, on the knowledge that he'd do as much for us."

"It's reciprocal. Naturally."

"But suppose it isn't Roy? Suppose when he gets back here you find it isn't the same man who was your partner before? Just as I've found myself with a stranger, instead of my former husband!"

"Wait a second!" Agret said, blinking. "I—"

"It's true! He's got someone else's arm, someone else's skin, someone else's brain! How can we feel loyal to this stranger? How can we owe him anything?"

"Wait a second," Agret said again, this time more calmly. "I think I'm beginning to get it."

"Well, doesn't it—" She stopped. Then, "Martin, I know how it must sound, but—"

"Not at all. I understand perfectly. You've been under a terrible strain, Jan."

He drummed on the desk, thinking this through. "It would seem that by all standards, both legally and morally, your marriage and our partnership are dissolved."

Agret had put it so well that there was nothing for Jan to do but nod agreement.

He tilted back in the chair, looking at the ceiling. "It's the old riddle, Jan. If you keep patching a pair of trousers until it is nothing but patches, is it the same pair of trousers or not?

"Well, according to our courts, it is!"

He put up his hand to keep her from interrupting. "I know it may sound wrong, but so the courts have decided. And so they would decide again. A man is not a pair of pants. According to the testimony of medical experts, there exists a totality which is more than the sum of the parts; personality may reside as much in the ligaments of the foot as in the brain."

"In other words—"

"It's the same Roy Price," he said,

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meaning: we're both stuck.

Agret saw her to the door, pausing at the threshold. "It'll work out, Jan. Trust to the wisdom of the law."

THE WISDOM of the law. That was a joke! Was the law a young woman chained to an elderly invalid? Did the law have to spend its days sitting on the terrace of a penthouse that was nothing but a glamorized jail?

"Do you have to pace like that?" Jan demanded.

Roy paused, leaning his weight against a large potted plant. He'd been touring the roof, taking in the warm sunlight that bathed the city below.

"Restless," he shrugged.

Jan looked at him in distaste. He was definitely grayer, and as he'd picked up weight, his paunch had grown larger, his fingers pudgier.

"It's not that," she said. "It's the way you walk, your shoulders all stooped like an old man. You were gay enough yesterday when the Crawfords were here."

He sighed deeply and came over to where she was sitting. "You think I hate you, don't you, Jan?"

What was there to lose? Let it come out in the open.

"Yes," she said.

He shook his head. "I don't know. It's not the accident. It's something else. The accident was mostly my fault. But this other thing—"

"What other thing?" Jan demanded.

"I don't know. I can't seem to get it."

He dropped into silence, his head forward, his eyes regarding her unblinkingly. "Something about our relationship," he said at last. "I—I can't seem to remember yet."

No, but he would. He'd remember the way she'd spent money, and he'd eventually figure out that she'd married him for nothing else but that money. Well, let him remember. He was stuck, too.

He was still sitting there, still staring at her with that strange intensity.

She thought: when he does that, he looks just like Fred.

And he did. He looked exactly like Fred when he stared that way. And the way he walked, all hunched up, that was like Fred, too.

A FEELING of horror welled up in Jan. There was something else, something else Roy had been doing, something she hadn't paid much attention to until now. And he was going to do it again!

Still staring at her, he lifted the little finger of his left hand and put it in his left ear!

She had given Fred to the Bank, and the Bank had given Fred back to her!

She fought down a scream. No, it couldn't be. Fred's hands had been thin; the one they'd given Roy was exactly like his own right hand.

But it wasn't the hand that directed the body, it was the brain. And of all the brains in the Bank, they had given Roy Fred's!

There was no doubt. It was the same walk, the same shift from cheerfulness with others to that silent staring at her. It was the same habit of picking at his ear.

And now he was doing it again! He was digging around and around and around!

The same brain. Fred's brain. He was trying to remember, and when he did remember, she knew what it would be.

"What's the matter?" Roy asked. "You look ill."

"No. No, I'm all right." Jan got up, forcing a smile. "Let's go and have a look at the city, shall we?"

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Obediently, he rose and walked by her side to the parapet, to one of the low points.

"Look!" Jan exclaimed. "The park. "The swans are in the lagoon."

Roy looked where she was pointing. "I can't seem to see them."

"Wait," she said. "I'll get the binoculars."

Turning quickly, before he could say anything, she took several steps toward the study doors. And then, with all the force she could muster, Jan turned once more and flung herself at Roy's back....

"I THINK," said Martin Agret, "that we can make the story stick. It sounded reasonable to the police, it ought to sound as good at the inquest tomorrow." Looking at Dr. Tripp, he said, "Thank you."

"Don't make me sound like a conspirator," the doctor grumbled. "I spoke nothing but the truth. I had observed a certain moodiness, a melancholy, since the accident."

"Just so there's no scandal," Roy Price said. He was propped up in bed, his face white as the sheets. "I couldn't take a scandal."

"Don't worry," Agret told him. "They can only figure two ways: either you threw her over or she jumped. And you're obviously not strong enough to have done the former. It's a natural for suicide while temporarily insane."

Roy nodded. "Thanks, Martin. It's fortunate I thought to call you before I called the police."

"Exactly what did happen?" the doctor asked.

Roy stared at him. "She told me to look at the swans. I looked while she went to get the glasses. Thinking I might see better from another point, I moved. And just then, she came sailing past me, past the spot I had just vacated, and out into space."

He shuddered violently and Martin said, "Take it easy, Roy."

"I've been thinking," Roy said. "Remembering. She never loved me. It was just the money. I'm even beginning to wonder about her first husband."

"Forget it," Agret told him. "She was temporarily insane."

"Definitely," Dr. Tripp concurred. "From a medical viewpoint—"

"From any viewpoint." Agret looked at Roy. "She was up at the office the other day, telling me you had become another man. You weren't Roy Price any longer. You had someone else's arm, someone else's skin, someone else's brain."

"Another man's brain?" Roy gasped. He was whiter than before, if that were possible.

"Nonsense," Dr. Tripp snorted.

"You see?" Agret said.

Roy disregarded his partner. "Are you sure?"

"Of course," the doctor assured him. "Once he got inside, Dr. Becker discovered the damage was not as extensive as we had thought. We never replace when we can repair satisfactorily. And you may check with the Bank if you don't believe me."

"You see?" Agret said again.

Roy nodded. "I suppose you're right. And you know, there was something preying on her mind, now that I think of it. She probably blamed herself for the accident."

"Whatever it was," Agret said, "we'll never know. It doesn't matter now anyway."

"Of course not," the doctor said. He stared at Roy. "Why do you keep digging at your ear that way. You've been doing it a great deal lately, I've noticed. Does it hurt?"

"No," Roy said. He looked at his little finger. "But since the accident, I've had a lot of wax in my ear."

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IN WHAT DARK

In the beast's eyes was a faraway look — as though he were someplace else

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MIND

By Rog Phillips

When the police came to arrest Ralph for murder, which would they find: a cringing man or a wild jungle beast?

"SO YOU AND Mabel want to visit the zoo," I said. "You won't believe it, Jerry, but Anna and I have never been there."

"No kidding, Ralph?" Jerry said incredulously.

"Don't call me Ralph," I said half humorously. "I'm Raja Singh, the mystic—"

"Don't kid us, Ralph," Mabel said, making a disrespectful face at me. "Jerry's told me too many stories about you and he growing up in the same neighborhood for me to take your racket seriously."

"It's not a racket," I said with pretended injured dignity. "I can see into the future. I can even see your future. You're going to murder Jerry when you get to Cairo, and marry a—"

"Don't!" Anna said sharply. "She might take it seriously."

"Not me," Mabel said, laughing.

"Let's go," Jerry said. "We only have this afternoon. In the morning we'll be half way to New York on the first lap of our vacation-round-the-world trip. I want to see that gorilla

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they have at the zoo—King's his name, isn't it—Raja, old boy?"

"Damfino," I said. "I'm only a native of Bigtown. You'll have to ask a tourist what the sights are."

We were all laughing as we went out the door. But we weren't laughing an hour later when we paused on the fringe of the crowd clustered in front of King's glassed-in cage.

"It's breathtaking!" Mabel said, her voice a trifle hysterical.

"Like looking at a monkey through a magnifying glass," her husband Jerry said in awed tones. "I never quite realized how big a full grown gorilla is."

"Neither had I," I said absently.

I was looking at the beast, *feeling* him as I *felt* people when I first met them. A refinement of that psychic sense which most people put down as first impressions.

His head, gigantic though it was, was more human in shape than any other simian I had ever seen. He was lying on his side, the thumb of one foot resting in the grip of a huge hand. The chart at the entrance had said he was six feet four inches in height, but if his legs had been as long in proportion to his body as those of a human he would have been at least nine feet tall.

His expression was placid, his black eyes fixed dreamily on the side wall of his cage.

I withdrew from my surroundings until the conversations around me were faint whispers, reaching out with my psychic tendrils as I tried to probe into the mind of the beast.

And suddenly he was looking at me. There was no mistake. There were dozens of people crowded around me, yet his eyes had singled me out and were resting on me.

I felt his cautious telepathic contact, questioning, yet wary as a jungle creature scenting the presence of a strange creature that might be friend or enemy.

"Ralph!"

"Huh?" I said, pulling myself back to my surroundings. I looked down. Mabel was tugging at my sleeve.

"That's the trouble with you Bigtown natives," she scolded. "Even in the presence of the greatest wonder of the age you fall asleep standing up. We're going to look at the panda now."

"Not the panda, honey," Jerry said patiently. "The penguins."

"All right, the penguins then," Mabel said good-humoredly. "But I want to see the panda too."

"Don't worry, we'll see everything including your panda," Jerry said.

"Come on, Ralph," Mabel said, taking my hand. "Go back to sleep. I'll lead you."

She pulled me along, making it seem a great effort, while Anna and Jerry grinned.

I looked back at King's cage. He had gotten to his feet and come to the bars behind the heavy plate glass front of the cage. His enormously thick arms were spread upward in a huge V, held by his hands gripping the two-inch bars. His black eyes were following me.

"I'll be back," I telepathed to him. "Tomorrow. And alone."

He blinked slowly. I couldn't tell if he understood or not. But I had a feeling that he knew I would come back...

"OHHH! ISN'T he wonderful!" a feminine voice squealed.

"Johnny! Stay with me," a worried woman called to a wiry youngster.

The crowd milled about me as I pushed my way gently but insistently toward the guard-rail that held the pressing throng away from the heavy

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plate glass front behind which King lolled, imprisoned in his cage of closely set two-inch bars that would have stopped a wildly plunging locomotive.

It had been two days since my first sight of King. I hadn't been able to come before. Mabel and Jerry, guest-like, had enthusiastically postponed their departure another twenty-four hours. I hadn't been able to break away.

But every minute of that time I had been looking forward to this moment, when I would be alone with King. Alone, though crowds pressed around me, because there would be no one to tug at my sleeve and drag me away. Alone to stand against the guardrail and half close my eyes, bringing all my powers to bear on contacting the mind of this great beast.

His black eyes were on me as I pushed through the crowd toward his cage. He had sighted me as I came through the entrance. His unblinking eyes had followed me, never leaving me.

I could feel him, feel his mind warily touching mine.

At last there was nothing in front of me but the pipe guard-rail. Three feet away was the expanse of plate glass. On the other side of it, less than ten feet from me, King's mighty frame was slouched in sitting posture against the steps leading up to the raised platform in the back of his cage.

I let my eyes explore his gigantic hairy body, almost afraid to look directly into those black unblinking eyes. My hands against the rail were sweaty and trembling as I delayed. I lifted my gaze to the large, patiently intelligent simian mouth, the flat black nostrils, glistening with a fine film of moisture.

As though drawn by a magnetic force my eyes moved the last few inches to lock with those of the beast. Lock, and form the telepathic bridge across which our thoughts could flow.

Abruptly the sounds around me ceased as though they no longer continued to exist. And into my mind flowed ponderously alien thoughts in a flow that no words could describe. Emotions were there. Irritation at a rheumatic pain in a knee joint, hunger coupled with the patient realization that feeding time was far off. Bold curiosity at this human who was different from other humans because he would sense what was in the mind. *Was* sensing.

For both of us the first wariness—fear—dropped away. A gladness rose within each of us at this thing that was taking place. A fierce happiness possessed King. Never in all his life had he found anything that could converse with him in the thought patterns that formed his thinking.

I awoke to my surroundings as though from a deep sleep, and glanced at my wristwatch. Two hours had passed! It had seemed no longer than ten minutes.

I looked up again into King's black, animal eyes.

"I will be back tomorrow," I telepathed.

He nodded slowly. He understood.

At the exit I turned to look back. He was at the bars, his huge frame dwarfing everything around it. His eyes were upon me, and into my mind crept the silent, lonely invitation: "Tomorrow."

MRS. FORBES smiled timidly at me. "So you think I should buy those lots on East Fifty-sixth," she said.

"Not I," I corrected in soothing tones. "My spirit guides. They tell me your Mars is passive for the next three weeks while your Sun is scintillating with promises of wealth."

I cupped my hands under the four-

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inch crystal ball on its base in the middle of my desk and watched the way it magnified the lines in the palms of my hands. I was tired, but Mrs. Forbes was a steady customer. My advice was sound, as she would find out. A friend of mine at Seibel's Construction Company had told me two days ago that Seibel's had submitted a bid for constructing an apartment house directly across the street from those vacant lots.

"Well," Mrs. Forbes said, "I guess I'll buy them then." It was the tone of a hard-headed business woman. She smiled, and with the smile became a warm-hearted woman again. "I made —considerable—on that last deal you advised me on," she said, fumbling with her purse. She took out a fifty dollar bill and laid it on the desk near my hand. "No—please keep it," she said as I made a half-hearted motion to push it toward her. "I'm superstitious about that. I have a feeling that if I didn't share with you—and your spirit guides—their advice would go wrong."

"Very well," I said, picking up the fifty and slipping it into a pocket through the folds of my robe. Giving her a very gentle and wise smile I added, "But only because of the way you feel about it. For myself I have no desire for material gain other than my regular fee—and that only because I must eat."

"I'll be going now, Raja Singh," she said, getting up.

I stood up, glancing into the full length mirror placed strategically across the room to make sure my large turban and long flowing robe were just right. She extended her thin hand across the desk. I took it, feeling its coldness, getting the same feeling I always had when I touched her that she was closer to death than she realized.

She smiled again at the door. Then she was gone. I took off the turban and dropped it over the crystal ball with a sigh of relief. It had been a hard evening. Fifteen fortunes at two bucks a fortune made thirty dollars, plus the fifty.

I went to the door and twisted the night latch to make sure no belated and unscheduled customer would come in, then returned to my desk and opened the bottom drawer, taking out the bottle of Scotch and the drinking glass.

Carefully measuring out a neat half inch I drank it slowly, letting it wash around in my mouth, feeling its fire as it went into my throat.

I closed my eyes and rubbed them gently with the tips of my fingers. The whiskey reached my stomach and began filtering into my blood stream, relaxing me.

Placing my fingers against my temples I leaned back, blanking my conscious thoughts, reaching out. Cautiously I groped for the *feel* of King's thoughts, careful to keep my own mind blank. It was something I had been doing for several days now.

The impressions in the beast's consciousness slowly came. The howling monkeys wouldn't go to sleep and were keeping the other residents of the building that housed King awake and restless. But they had a reason. A baby monkey had died and its mother was hugging its cold form to her breast, trying to keep warmth in it. King was amusing himself by imagining that he was in the same cage, crushing the howlers one after another in his huge hands until they stopped howling.

I let my conscious mind take his thoughts, his emotions, and possess them, slowly becoming bolder in my contact as my own thoughts matched those of the gorilla.

When I broke the contact I knew

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he had not been aware that I had made it. I didn't want him to. It was a part of a plan that had evolved in my thoughts over the days that I had spent before his cage, while both of us became more adept at telepathic exchange. A plan so daring that I trembled when I thought of it.

It might take a year to accomplish my purpose. Two years. But I was in no hurry. The very essence of the plan was that King should not suspect. And so far he hadn't. If he had, I would be able to detect his suspicion at once.

"RALPH! Wake up!"

Anna's voice was sharply impatient. I opened my eyes. She was standing in the doorway of the bedroom, a letter in her hand.

"We got a letter from Mabel and Jerry," she said. "They're back home in Seattle now. You can read it over breakfast."

"Okay," I said sleepily, pushing the covers away and sitting up.

"We had such a nice time when they were here," Anna said with a mixture of happiness and wistfulness. "I wish you'd take me to the zoo again sometime, Ralph."

"Why go again?" I grunted, getting out of bed. "Nothing there but some monkeys. I'll take you to a show sometime when the string of suckers drops off so I can have an evening off."

"That reminds me," Anna said. "Where were you yesterday afternoon? I called your office and you weren't there."

"What time?" I asked cautiously.

"About three o'clock," Anna said.

"Funny," I said, sensing a trap. "I'd swear I was there at three. I stepped out for half an hour once, but I don't think it was three when I did."

"It doesn't matter," Anna said. "But does it really pay to tie yourself down at your office in the afternoons? You've been doing it ever since Jerry and Mabel were here. I—I'm practically a fortune teller's widow with you gone all afternoon and most of the night too."

"It brings in a little extra," I said. "Yesterday I had five customers in the afternoon. Ten bucks I might not have gotten otherwise. Women who can't get away evenings. They'd go to some other fortune teller if I weren't there. Which reminds me—I made an appointment for one o'clock today. What time is it?"

"Oh, no!" Anna wailed. "Not one! It's almost twelve now!" She sighed resignedly. "Well, hurry up and get dressed then. I'll get your breakfast on the table."

She backed out of the room...

KING WAS standing against the front bars of his cage, his head turned toward the entrance expectantly. I had telepathed my arrival as soon as I got off the bus.

Our telepathic exchanges now were as casual and normal as speech. There were no words involved. Just images and emotions and ideative actions, woven into mental pictures in a sort of sign language that was as expressive as verbal speech and much swifter.

"There's that man again, mommy," a little girl said as I slipped into the crowd.

"He's an F. B. I. agent, honey," a man who seemed to be the little girl's father said in a hoarse whisper he intended me to hear. "They think King is a spy."

I grinned at the man and my grin turned into a broad smile at the rounded O of the little girl's mouth as she stared at me, her face expressing belief.

Then I was at the guard-rail, the little girl and her parents forgotten—and everything else. I was looking up into King's eyes as he stood there be-

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fore me. After the first greeting I projected a series of images into his mind that told him to go sit with his back to the ladder.

Obediently he did so. When he was settled he looked at me for a minute, then turned away. That was our usual procedure now. It was too suspicious when we continued to stare at each other. There was no need of it any more anyway. The telepathic bridge between our minds had grown too strong to need the bridge of optical contact.

I dropped my eyes to the concrete floor of his cage, absorbing the aura of the beast, the mood of contentment and bullying good nature.

Slowly I picked up the various threads of his conscious thought, holding them in my consciousness, knitting my mind to his. Today I would try the great experiment that I had been building toward for so long.

And then suddenly—

My heart was pounding against my ribs, my breath forcing its way through inadequate nostrils.

For a brief second I had been looking at the crowd. I had not turned my head nor lifted my eyes. No. *I had seen the crowd from the other side of the plate glass wall and heavy steel bars.* And in the immediate foreground of my vision had been a huge hairy arm, a broad hairy foot.

I had been *seeing through King's eyes.*

SHE COUGHED spasmodically, struggling with her purse until she had extracted a pitifully small lace handkerchief to place over her mouth.

"You should get that cough taken care of, Mrs. Forbes," I said gently.

"It's nothing," she said, the coughing degenerating into a series of occasional feeble barks. Finally her normal cheerful smile asserted itself. "Tell me, Raja. How does my future look? How long can I expect to live?"

I dropped my eyes to the crystal ball quickly, pretending to concentrate on its depths. Slowly I smiled.

"You are soon to embark on a long journey," I said, looking up.

"Nonsense, Raja Singh," Mrs. Forbes snorted. "I have no intention of travelling. Save that line for your younger clients." She became semi-serious. "Why don't you capitalize on your ability? Two days after I bought those lots I received an offer from a chain store for double what I paid for them."

"Did you sell?" I asked.

"No," she said. A smile slowly wreathed her pinched face. "I waited until they tripled their offer, then sold. So . . ."

She laid two one-hundred-dollar bills on the desk with careful drama.

I whistled silently. "Maybe I'd better save them so that when my advice doesn't pay off I can make good your losses," I suggested.

"Don't be foolish," she said. A fit of coughing seized her again. When it subsided she said, "You sidestepped my question about how long I have to live. But I don't really want you to tell me that. What does the crystal ball say would be a good investment right now for a quick turnover."

I dropped my eyes to the crystal ball, let them see the magnified lines in the palms of my hands for a moment, then threw them out of focus, blocking off vision, studying the vague mental patterns that drifted into my mind.

The name of a stock came. I studied its associated feelings, deciding she owned a large block of that stock and was thinking of buying more. She had spent the day studying the market. Slowly the panorama of her mind came into focus, the machinations of her judgment. She was

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wrong. I felt that strongly.

"You are planning on buying more shares in Confederate Can," I said abruptly. "I'd suggest you sell all you have the first thing in the morning, but be ready to buy back when it's dropped a couple of dollars. It may drop more, but that will be a safe move, because when it starts up it'll be hard to get."

I straightened up, sighing. Mrs. Forbes was staring at me with rounded eyes.

"Sometimes I'm afraid of you, Raja Singh," she whispered. Then she smiled to let me know she wasn't really. "How did you know about that stock."

"My spirit—" I began.

"I know," she sighed, standing up. "Your spirit guide." She went to the door. Turning, she gave me an arch smile, then left, closing the door softly.

I leaped up and locked the door. Returning to my chair I took out the bottle and poured a stiff drink. When it began to course through my veins I closed my eyes.

Almost imperceptibly a feeling of latent power possessed me. I slipped into the process of cautiously contacting King and merging my thoughts and emotions with his, blending them, gradually asserting my will....

I WAS blinking up at the feeble blue light in the corridor at the back of my cage. Mine? I tried to chuckle, but my throat muscles wouldn't respond.

I held up my hand, gloating in its animal strength, its shape. I let my eyes roam over the concrete floor until they encountered a wilted carrot. Reaching out, I took it between thick fingers and flicked it against the wall, watching it flatten and go to pieces from the tremendous force.

Turning over and standing up, with my heavy body resting on short legs and the knuckles of my hands, I walked slowly to the front bars of the cage and looked across the gloom enshrouded wide lane at the cages on the other side. Apes and baboons were there, asleep.

Up the line a howler monkey sang out, to be instantly set upon by his companions and quieted.

Directly across from me a female baboon awoke and looked at me owlishly. I grinned and waved at her. She squeezed her infant closer to her belly and huddled down in fear, her wide eyes still watching.

I looked around once more, listening to the hushed night sounds in the building, the distant roar of a lion in another building. Then I lay down and closed my eyes.

When I opened them they encountered the label of the bottle of Scotch. I reached for it. My hand stopped in mid air. I frowned at it, feeling almost contempt for it. It was so pitifully small. So weak. I watched it close about the neck of the bottle.

"THERE'S the paper, Ralph." Anna said, nodding toward it and turning back to the stove to stir whatever she was heating.

"I'm too tired tonight to bother with it," I said, dropping into a chair in the breakfast nook.

"What kept you so long?" Anna said crossly. "It's after midnight. You didn't have suckers lined up that long, did you?"

"Almost," I said. "Why didn't you go to bed? No use your staying up this late."

She brought my loaded plate over and sat down across from me, her bathrobe falling open to reveal the sheer blue nightgown I had bought her a month before.

"I'm enough of a widow as it is," she sighed. "If I went to sleep before

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you got home I'd only see you for half an hour or so in the mornings."

"We're making money though," I grinned. "Maybe we could take a trip around the world ourselves pretty soon."

"If we do," she said dryly, "you won't be telling any fortunes on the trip." She stared at the tablecloth for several minutes while I ate in silence. Her expression became wistful. "I'd like that," she said. "We could—sort of—you know—have a second honeymoon. It's been a long time."

"Sure, honey," I murmured. I broke a piece of bread to mop up the last of the gravy on my plate. The movement of my hand as it swiped around the plate caught my eye. I frowned.

"Let's go to bed, Anna," I said, pushing back my chair.

She blinked at me as I got up.

"All right, Ralph," she said.

I went into the bedroom and started undressing. By the time I was ready for bed she had finished rinsing off the dishes and come in. In bed, with the lights off, I lay there with my eyes open. From the street a block or two away came the sound of an automobile horn. After a while a four-motor plane droned in, passing overhead and receding southward toward the airport. After it had been gone a long time a lonesome gust of wind pushed aside the lace curtains over the windows near the foot of the bed. They dropped back into place and were quiet, barely visible. Anna's soft breathing came with rhythmic slowness.

I wasn't aware of going to sleep. But suddenly I was wide awake. I had awakened with a feeling that something was wrong. Alarmed, I froze into immobility while my senses gradually sharpened.

I was on my knees. My shoulders were tense. I became aware that the first faint flush of dawn was creeping into the room, giving things a kind of phosphorescent visibility. I was still in bed. My eyes encountered my hands and my mind shocked into full wakefulness. My hands. I drew them away from Anna's throat and shrank back from her.

Her rhythmic breathing came to my ears. I searched her throat for bruises. Marks. Her white, soft throat was unmarred. She was asleep, unaware of what had almost happened.

TREMBLING uncontrollably I slipped out of bed and put on my bathrobe. I fumbled in my pockets on the chair for cigarettes and my lighter, then went into the living room and closed the door.

"The cunning of that beast," I said aloud, lighting a cigarette with fingers that shook almost too much to accomplish their task. "The utter animal cunning of him."

Full realization of what had happened sunk in as I paced the carpet in my bare feet, smoking cigarette after cigarette.

There was no doubt of it. He had been aware of my experiment. Without letting me be aware of it he had let me go on, perfecting the process of transfer, and now he had done what I had done—only I had awakened in time to prevent—

"He was going to kill Anna!" I heard my voice say the words as though it were someone else in the room talking.

I ground out my fifth cigarette in as many minutes and went into the kitchen and heated the coffee left in the pot, cursing a wet spot on the floor that my bare feet had stepped into.

One thing was certain. I didn't dare go back to bed and sleep even if it were possible in my state of mind. I had to stay awake.

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The coffee started to boil. I poured a cup of the black steaming fluid and sat down at the breakfast nook. The dawn light was stronger. Down in the street a garbage truck stopped and cans began to bang as they were dumped and set down empty on the sidewalk.

I gulped some of the bitter brew. There was the evening paper I hadn't read. I hadn't read the paper for a long time. With a sigh of relief I spread it out and lit another cigarette. My eyes froze on the headlines.

MONSTER STRIKES DOWN FIFTEENTH VICTIM

And in the right hand double column began: Caroline Evans, seven-year-old daughter of Reverend Carl Evans of the First Congregational Church was found...her body horribly battered and mutilated...the fifteenth victim in the last twenty days...

My eyes blurred. I staggered blindly to the sink and retched, shaken with the horror that filled my soul.

I KNEW TO its full extent the jungle cunning of King now, as I leaned against the sink, too weak to stand. For twenty days or more he had hidden behind his surface thoughts the same kind of plan that I myself in my human superiority complex had hidden. But there had been a major difference.

My purpose had been scientific. During the moments when my conscious mind had seemed to completely reside within the beast I had been content to listen and observe, perhaps moving about the cage a bit to enjoy the thrill of that massive machine of muscle.

King had seen in the process of transfer a means of escape from his cage. Not physically, but it amounted to the same thing. In control of my body and my senses he had roamed the streets, a gorilla in everything except physical form, venting his lust to kill, to crush, then *returning* to his cage when his lust was sated.

I washed my face in cold water and returned to the table, gulping down the cold coffee and lighting a cigarette.

Things were beginning to click into place in my mind. The way I would fall asleep on the bus coming down town from the zoo, and wake up on another bus an hour later. The way I would take a drink after my last customer had left my office at around ten o'clock in the evening, and find that in some unaccountable way the hours had passed by and it was midnight or after.

Yes. King had been cunning. I hadn't suspected. I had thought my new habit of falling asleep was due to excessive mental exhaustion from my experiment.

His mistake had been in trying to kill Anna. There my subconscious had fought hard enough to dislodge him and wake me. A beast, raised from infancy behind bars and alone, he simply had not comprehended the emotion of love for another creature. That had been his undoing.

But now—

What could I do? There was the problem. The grim reality I must face. At any time he might take over again, and kill again. Sooner or later I would fall asleep. I could prevent him from possessing me while I stayed awake and alert—but for how long could I stay that way?

Suddenly I remembered the letter from Jerry and Mabel, and my idle remark that we might take a trip around the world ourselves. There was the answer!

I stole softly into the bedroom and brought my clothes into the kitchen. When I had dressed I scribbled a

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hasty note to Anna telling her to pack. That I had decided we would take our trip now and had gone down to get the tickets.

It was a little before seven as I left the apartment. I joined the throng of early risers going to work, glad of having to stand up in the crowded bus.

The travel agency, I found, wouldn't open until nine-thirty. I bought the morning paper and had breakfast in a cafeteria while I forced myself to read all the gruesome details of the latest atrocity my hands had perpetrated.

At nine-thirty I was standing at the entrance to the travel agency. At ten-thirty I left, a thick envelope of tickets in my breast pocket.

On the sidewalk I looked up at the heights of the buildings around me, pressing down on me, imprisoning me. The last words of the agent were seared into my mind.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Baker," he had said. "That was the last place. There simply isn't space on any train or plane until eight tomorrow morning. You'll have to be content with that. I've made reservations for you and your wife on the eight o'clock plane tomorrow morning. That's the best that can be done."

His tone had been more than exasperated; he had begun to be suspicious. And suddenly I had realized that I—*I*—could be suspected of committing those murders! I hadn't quite realized that before.

The papers had mentioned descriptions of the suspect, fingerprints on a piece of iron pipe beside one of the victims. It hadn't quite clicked.

It had been King who had committed the murders, not I. But it had been my body, my muscles, my hands, that had performed the deeds.

The buildings around me pressed down on me like the bars of a cage. I raised my hands before my face, the hands that had crushed the life out of little Caroline Evans. The hands that could convict me. "Twenty-two hours!" I whispered as I stared at them.

"THAT WILL be two dollars, Miss Lewis," I said.

"Wellll. . .all right," the young lady said, her eyes turned on. She opened her purse. "I could use a drink," she said suddenly. "Got any around?"

"Sorry," I lied. "One touch of it would destroy my psychic powers. Those things come only from living a clean life."

She blinked, digesting the implications of my remark. Her eyes became shrewd as they surveyed my features. She opened her mouth, thought better of it, and silently extracted two one dollar bills from her purse.

"Thank you," I said, giving her my professional smile.

I accompanied her to the door. She stood there, breathless in one last attempt. I opened the door.

"Are you busy, Raja?" a familiar voice spoke just outside.

"Mrs. Forbes!" I said in glad relief. Then, "Peace be with you, Miss Lewis."

Mrs. Forbes came in. I closed the door on Miss Lewis' departing back. Mrs. Forbes had already taken her place in the low ottoman in front of my desk.

Instead of sitting down behind my crystal ball, I hooked a leg over the corner of the desk.

"I'm glad you came," I said.

"She was trying to make you?" Mrs. Forbes said in a worldly wise tone.

"That isn't the reason," I said. "I'm closing shop after tonight for an indefinite period. Taking a trip overseas. Tibet, India, by way of Europe and perhaps coming back across the

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Pacific. I'd have hated to leave without saying goodbye to you."

For a long minute she sat there, her face wooden. A tear crept out of the corner of her eyes.

"Well," she said abruptly, sniffing loudly. "All good things come to an end sometime or other."

She opened her purse and brought out several crisp hundred-dollar bills. She spread them out on the desk in the shape of a fan. There were five of them.

"Here's a little going away present," she said, smiling.

"No, no!" I said. "I can't take that."

"Please do, Raja Singh."

She was sitting erect, her head lifted proudly, a tight little smile on her face. Impulsively I reached to embrace her. She saw my movement. Her head lifted. Her smile grew tender. My hands came to rest on her frail shoulders....

Something was wrong. Her head lay affectionately against my hand. But it was cold. Suddenly she slumped back, her head rolling loosely.

There were livid bruises on her neck. Her face was battered and discolored.

"God!" I panted. "Dear, dear God!" I stared down at her. "I've got to get her out of here," I heard myself whisper hoarsely.

I went to the door and looked out. There was no one in the hall.

There were the back steps, the door into the alley. Quickly I picked her up. Her head lay on my shoulder as I carried her into the hall and along it, my steps echoing loudly in the deserted building.

The back stairs were narrow. I slung the limp form over my shoulder and stumbled down them into the darkness. My hand found the knob. I opened the door.

The alley was dark, deserted. At either end people were walking past, not looking in, unable to see anything in the gloom if they did.

Twenty feet down the alley were some packing boxes. I half ran, half stumbled to them. I lifted the lid of one, the nails screaming their protest.

A convulsive movement of my shoulder dropped the body into the darkness. I dropped the lid down and turned back to the door I had just come through. It was locked.

"The night latch!" I groaned.

I stared at the end of the alley, the people walking past so complacently. I would have to step out of the alley into the light of the street. People would look at me and forget me. Tomorrow when they read of the sixteenth victim of the killer they would remember. They would go to the police.

A breath of relief escaped me. Tomorrow I would be far away. I took off my turban and rolled it up in my robe, crushing it flat and wadding it into a compact bundle.

A short squat woman and her husband looked at me idly as I stepped out of the alley. Looking at them, I bumped into a man. We made our excuses and I hurried on. Against my will my mind conjured up visions of those faces on the witness stand, saying, "Yes, that's him. He was coming out of the alley."

But that wouldn't be. By the time the body was found I would be on the plane for New York. With luck I would be on the plane out over the ocean, or perhaps even in Europe.

"I've got to keep awake," I muttered.

AT THE building entrance I hesitated. I didn't want to go back into that room. I had to get rid of the turban and robe though. And there was that five hundred dollars. Also the lights to be turned out.

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I took the steps two at a time. At my office I darted in, tossed the bundle on the daybed, scooped up the money on my desk, and rushed back out, turning off the lights and locking the door.

Turning off the light at the head of the stairs, I trotted down. When I had locked the front entrance I breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

My watch said ten-thirty. It surprised me. So much had happened in so short a time.

I had called Anna earlier in the evening and told her I would be busy straightening things up at the office and would meet her at the airport in the morning. She had been too happy to question me on anything.

I bought an evening paper and relaxed in a busy restaurant over a hot meal, nibbling at it and reading the rehash of the monster murders.

It closed at midnight. I wandered down toward the skidrow section, taking my time and window shopping. Two blocks into the skidrow I was stopped by a hollow-chested man in a worn dark suit.

"Like to play some poker, mister?" he said. "Nice game going on at a place not far from here."

"Poker?" I exclaimed. "That's just the thing!" I grinned and slipped him a buck. "Lead me to it. I feel lucky."

Three hours later I slid my chair back and smiled wryly at the ring of politely sad faces around the table.

"Sorry, boys," I shrugged. "I'm cleaned. I'll have to just watch."

"Sorry, Mack," a heavy set brute who had been serving coffee to the players said. "The boys don't like anybody to just watch. Makes 'em nervous. Come back some other time when you feel more lucky."

"I couldn't feel any more lucky than when I came in tonight," I said, laughing.

There were polite laughs. The dealer shuffled the cards. I was forgotten.

Mrs. Forbes' five hundred and the twenty I had taken in besides that had bought three hours of respite. I continued my walking and window shopping.

Windows with heavy grill work behind them, and cameras, musical instruments, bowling balls, surveyors' transits, and a hundred other things lined my way for a few blocks.

Two policemen walking side by side swinging nightsticks glanced at me in passing. I paused in front of a men's store and pretended to look in the windows until they had rounded the corner half a block away....

I turned back to the display behind the window. I had been wrong. It wasn't men's suits. It was hardware. I blinked my eyes, startled. It was light. The light of late dawn. And it had been dark a moment before!

Sick with fear and horror I ran to the corner and read the street signs. I was two miles from where I should have been.

A cruising taxi appeared far down the street coming toward me. Suddenly, like a brilliant light, inspiration struck me.

"The bottle in my desk!" I exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that? If I were dead drunk King could do nothing about it!"

I ran into the street, waving my arms to attract the cab driver.

I WAS SOBBING with relief as I pulled open the drawer and brought out my bottle of Scotch. I splashed some of the liquid into a glass and downed it, then dropped into my chair, settling back with a sigh of contentment.

I poured some more. The bottle had been almost a third full. I felt uneasy. A third of a fifth wasn't enough to really reduce me to the

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state of drunkenness necessary to make my muscles unmanageable. But already I was feeling better. The tiredness and stiffness were dropping away from me.

I drained the bottle. I looked at it, resting on the desk beside my crystal ball, a monument to—to—

My thoughts were growing vague. I lifted my arm and studied my wristwatch, trying to make out the hands to see what time it was.

"To hell with it," I grumbled.

The empty bottle bothered me. I grabbed it and staggered to my feet, turning toward the window.

"Need some air," I muttered.

I set the empty bottle on the sill and lifted up the lower window. When I reached for the bottle again my fingers missed it. It fell over, rolling out. I leaned out in time to see it hit the sidewalk fifteen feet below and shatter.

From blocks away rose the faint wail of a siren. I drew my head back in and listened. It was growing louder. In moments it had turned into the street two blocks down and was screaming toward me. A police car.

I closed the window and stood to one side, peeking down. It drew to the curb. Four uniformed men climbed out and disappeared toward the entrance. In following them I noticed a taxi parked at the curb.

"That taxi driver!" I whispered. "Of course. He suspected me."

There were loud footsteps coming up the stairs, in the hall, then pausing outside my door.

"This is the door he went in," the driver's voice came to my ears.

There came a knock. I blinked at the expressionless panel of the door. I'd have to bluff it out, put on a surprised innocent front.

I said loudly, "Just a minute." I started toward the door.

I took one step. Then I saw it. My blood froze with the horror of it, laying there on the floor. My eyes darted around the room.

"The window!" I breathed. But the window was closed. They would hear it open. They would search my office if I hid it. There was nothing I could do with Mrs. Forbes' shoe.

"Open up in there," a brittle voice said through the door. "This is a police officer."

I stood, paralyzed, unable to move or to make a sound. It was the end. I knew it. In a moment they would break in and seize me. When Mrs. Forbes' body was found they would connect it up with that shoe on the floor. Witnesses would look at me.

"That's him," they would say. "That's him."

"Open up or we'll break in!" a voice said grimly.

Suddenly, like a refreshing bath, the realization came to me what I could do, what I must do. It was not I who had killed, but King. King should be punished. Not I. And King *would* be punished!

"Stand clear in there," the voice commanded. "We're going to shoot out the lock."

I closed my eyes. With every ounce of will I concentrated, reaching out.

"King!" I whispered. "K i n g ! Come and take me. Come!"

And sleepy night sounds came to my ears. A baboon coughing. The distant trumpeting of a she elephant.

I opened my eyes. The heavy bars formed a wall that contained my world. Across the way a she baboon stared at me owlishly. I grinned my triumph. This time I was here to stay.

DAY CAME. The doors were opened. People collected in front of the cage. I watched them, secretly amused and wondering what they would do if they knew that I, the mind of a human, looked out at them

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from the eyes of the gorilla.

I was no longer afraid. Scintillating in the heavens of my mind was a star that insured the conviction that I was here to stay. That King could never dislodge me. That even when my human body with King in it went to the gas chamber and died I would remain here.

The day ended. Night came. I fell asleep with my mental eyes fixed on that star—and when I awakened it was still there. I was still in the body of the beast.

The second day passed. The third. I was at peace. Secure. Then abruptly my ideal existence was shattered.

The crowd was thick in front of my cage. I wasn't paying particular attention to it. Suddenly a face in the foreground of the crowd forced its way into my consciousness. It was Anna's.

"Anna!" I exclaimed before I could think. Fortunately the untrained neural circuits of the gorilla throat could not carry out the command I sent them.

I sank back, watching her. Her eyes were large and red. She had cried a lot. Why was she here? Did she guess?

But of course not! She had often wanted to visit the zoo once again. Now that—that she was free to do as she wished, she had come here, perhaps living again those happy moments when we had all been here together, she, Mabel, Jerry, and I.

Of course that was it. I relaxed and watched her boldly, secure in the knowledge that she couldn't possibly suspect. After a while she slipped through the crowd and was gone.

But the next day she came back. And the next. There was no longer any doubt. She suspected. Perhaps she knew. If she did she wasn't saying anything. Perhaps she realized it was better being here than being punished for the crimes committed by the gorilla. She was coming each day just to be near me.

As the days passed I grew used to her visits. Summer ended. Winter came. People tracked snow through the corridor outside the cage. Anna came bundled up, took up her vigil, and left with bowed head.

Winter passed into spring and spring into summer again. I was happy. Often I forgot that I was human and caught myself thinking as a gorilla. It began to worry me. The day might come when I could no longer remember that I was human.

It was in the night when all was quiet that the grand idea came to me. I sat up on my haunches, excited. Experimentally I picked up a stalk of celery and held it in my hand like a pencil, tracing figures on the concrete. Of course! I could write!

When the keepers passed through in the morning I was ready. I greeted them with a low growl and a broad grin. Getting their attention I pretended to concentrate on the floor at my feet.

Cupping my lips I went through the motions of writing. They didn't understand. They passed on.

I persisted. Every time they came through the narrow corridor behind my cage I went through the same act, until:

"You'd almost think he was trying to tell us he wants to write!" one of them remarked.

"Maybe we should get him some pencils and paper," the other said.

My heart pounded with hope. But they forgot. The paper and pencils didn't come. Still I persisted. Eventually, as a joke, they brought them. Six newly sharpened pencils and a thick tablet of paper.

Seizing them I took them to the center of my cage, afraid that they would be taken from me. The keep-

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ers merely laughed and went on their way.

I waited impatiently for night to come. When it did I began to write, clumsily at first as my thick hairy fingers learned the unaccustomed skill under the guidance of my mind. Pencils broke until those brute fingers that could crush a skull learned to use a delicate touch.

Night after night I wrote, sleeping with the paper pad and pencils under me where they couldn't be reached.

And now it is done. My story is completed. I feel almost regretful that this is so. When this night is over the pad and the pencils will be near the bars where the keepers can get them.

What will happen then I don't know. More and more swiftly the attributes of the human are slipping from me, those of the beast growing stronger. But at least I have done my duty by mankind. I performed an experiment that has never been tried before. Sixteen, perhaps seventeen lives were lost in that experiment. Those lives were not taken in vain. There is now this story, this document, whose existence no one can deny, whose source, through the fingers of King, the gorilla, cannot be denied.

One last word before I lay aside my pencil. Anna, I love you. But I'm beyond your reach. My body is undoubtedly dead by now. Executed for those atrocities. Don't forget me—but please, please turn away from me. Seek happiness. Find a normal life and a love that can enrichen your life rather than sap it dry.

That is all.

EPILOGUE

ANNA, HER face flushed, her breath coming fast, hurried along the corridor, her eyes reading the lettering on each door. She stopped before the one that read: SUPERINTENDENT.

She hesitated briefly, then knocked.

"Come in," a voice sounded.

Hesitating briefly she turned the knob and pushed open the door. Inside, a man slight of build with a high intellectual forehead was rising from a seat behind a huge desk.

"Oh, hello, Anna," he said, hurrying forward and taking her hands in his.

"What is it?" Anna said. "You called me and left word for me to come over."

The man dropped her hands and stepped back, a wry smile on his lips.

"We found you were right," he said. "Mad though it sounded, you were right. We have something to prove it now." He laid his palm on the soiled and well-used pencil tablet. "This," he said. "It's probably one of the most unusual and important documents in the history of science. It was written by—*your husband.*"

Slow comprehension of his words appeared on her face. Her eyes brightened. A smile tugged at her lips hopefully.

The man picked up another set of papers neatly clipped together and handed them to her.

"These are photostats of the pages of the pencil tablet," he said. "I want you to take them home and study them. Make notes. Confirmatory notes. Discrepancies if you find any. Both are extremely important." His face relaxed in a smile. "There's a message at the end just for you. I think it's good advice for you to follow. And please go through this as quickly as you can and bring it back with your notes."

"I will," Anna said.

She stood up, ready to leave. She paused as she saw he was about to

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say something more.

There was a frown of deliberation on his face. He hesitated before speaking.

"I don't want to hold out any hope for you," he said finally. "It was quite definitely your husband who wrote what's in that tablet. But when you read it I think you will see why we can probably never reach him. He's a prisoner by his own choice. It's a pattern that's more or less standard in cases such as his, the major difference from my standpoint being that he wished to reach back and tell us about it. But we will almost certainly never be able to reach him, because to him we can't exist.

"He's walled himself in in the typical schizo manner with a world that fits his desires and protects him from the reality he can't face—ever. A world that accounts for everything he can accept, cut off completely from hearing and sight, and all avenues of the senses used to reach the normal mind. You will see when you read what he's written that nothing could ever make him realize that he *never was in telepathic contact with that gorilla.*"

THE END

ALWAYS KISS AN AMAZON!

By CHARLES RECOUR

JERRY LANNING finished checking the instruments. He straightened up, wiped the sweat from his brow and started to walk across the compound. Overhead the huge Jovian disc was beginning to sink in the sky, and outside the electrically charged fence that surrounded the compound, the night noises were commencing. But Jerry'd been On Station—a radio pulse job for astrogational aid for three weeks now and he was beginning to get used to the oddities of the sweltering Ionian days and nights.

He glanced outside the fenced compound before he stepped into the aluminum hut that housed the transmitter, receiver, and his humble, simple, efficient, housekeeping facilities. Yes, she was still there. Outside the fence, glaring contemptuously through it, the Amazon, nude save for a couple of wisps of animal-hide, leaned on her longbow. For a week at a time, the Amazons would station the same girl to the duty. Jerry's feeble attempts to converse had been squelched at once by a menacing raising of the long, barbed arrows held in a quiver at the girls' sides.

Jerry shook his head. "G'night," he called, in the lingua franca that served for official communication. The Amazon said nothing, but Jerry felt an uncomfortable feeling as he stared at her statuesque beauty so remote and untouchable—yet so near.

In the hut, his eye fell on the large lettering of the chart. "Oh hell," he muttered, "why?"

"Under no circumstances," the chart read in bold black letters, "are operators of this station to attempt communication of any sort with Amazonia or the Amazons. Remember you are dealing with an absolute matriarchy which destroys its males at birth save for those used for breeding purposes!"

Jerry was familiar with the hard-won concessions of just permitting the existence of the Astrogator Radio Station, obtained after long negotiation by the System Patrol.

But he also knew that in the eighteen months the Station had been in existence, the ravishingly beautiful Amazons—they'd been automatically dubbed that by Lenton, the explorer who'd established the Station—had never once communicated with the Earthmen. One or two hardy souls who'd left the compound had been found with yard-long shafts through their bodies.

Jerry sighed at the thought of all that waste of beauty, and the disturbing image of the girl outside the compound crossed his eyes. She was a prize. His one overture to friendliness had been rejected in no uncertain terms when she loosed a shaft two inches from his head the other day when he'd opened his mouth to talk, at the same time extending a piece of candy in his hand. Momentarily, his hand had touched his blaster—but he came to his senses.

Outside, the roaring and growling of the night-beasts began. Jerry thought of the girl outside the electrified fence and wondered how she stood it. The Amazons used poisoned arrows he knew, and they could bring down any of the reptilian-animal, monster who infested the surrounding jungle, but—Jerry shuddered. Jerry knew also that if a girl was killed as had happened, the Amazons simply put another one there.

Jerry stiffened. Outside came a piercing scream. He ran out the hut door and stared into a circle of light from the compound lighting system.

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The Amazon stood there, her back to the fence and only three feet away. Facing her and grimly stalking her was the reptilian-headed parody of a tiger, its cat-like body studded with arrow shafts, its snake-like head whipping to and fro. Slowly it advanced on the girl. As quickly as she could draw her arrows she was sending them into the beast but instead of crumpling to the ground, the animal, evidently impervious to the poison, came on. As she loosed her last arrow, the beast sprang. The girl shrieked wildly and at the same instant Jerry's blaster jumped into his hand and he sent a point-blank bolt into the animal's head.

The head vanished in a flare of flame just as the beast sprawled across the girl's body. She went down beneath it, struggling wildly. Jerry opened the compound wire gate through the insulated handle and dragged the girl's body from beneath the animal. A long ugly red-line, bleeding profusely, ran down her side where the raking talons of the animal had done their work.

Jerry lifted the Amazon's limp body into his arms and entered the compound. He put her on his bed and went to work with the first aid kit. As he cleaned the blood away he saw the wound was less serious than it appeared, but certainly she'd be queit for a moment. He continued to bathe her with the antiseptic solution, as she stirred slowly to consciousness.

She came to abruptly. She glanced around momentarily saw her surroundings, saw the man bending over her! Horrified, more afraid than when the beast had attacked her, she sat erect, her hand plunging into her skumpy garment for her knife. She whipped it up just as Jerry closed within her. Impulsively he drew her hard against him and savagely brought his mouth down on hers. The kiss jarred her to the core. Completely startled she dropped the knife and made a spontaneous effort to disengage herself, and then stopped! This kiss was new—and interesting.

Jerry met the delegation of Amazons at the gate the next morning. Beautiful but grim, the four women faced him.

"Where is Een?" the queenly one asked.

Jerry gestured toward the doorway. "She is coming now."

The girl ran forward, wincing slightly as her wounded leg took her weight.

"I will remain with the Stranger, Sherry," she said smiling, "he saved me from the *Writh.*"

"He does not force you to do this?" the other inquired incredulously.

"No," Een replied smiling, "I wish this. It is as it should be."

Jerry stood back, grinning at the conversation. From now on, he thought, Earthlings and Amazons are going to get on all right...

PITUITARY MYSTERY

By A. MORRIS

THE BERRY-LIKE little gland located at the base of the brain and for a long time regarded as vestigial as the appendix, has been recognized to be one of the most important controls of a human being. The pituitary gland gets its name from the Greek word for phlegm because the early biologists thought it was the source of mucous from the nose.

We have since learned that it is the glandular tissue which controls our rate of growth and the giants and dwarfs that we see are the product of the failure of this organ to do its duty.

When the gland secretes too powerfully, the huge giant results. When the glands fail to operate the apathetic idiot's idiot appears, a creature completely disinterested in living.

It has now been learned through exhaustive experimenting on rats that the pituitary secretions are intimately connected with hormone output, which in turn controls the masculinity and femininity of humans and which has a definite effect on our energetic actions in making our lives something.

In addition there is a possibility that a connection may exist between cancer incidence and pituitary activity. It is astounding to reflect that a tiny gland like this, no bigger than a small berry, can have such a tremendous determining effect upon a human being!

The Stuff Can Kill You!

By LEE OWEN

A CLUE has been gotten to Man's inexplicable susceptibility to disease and sickness and it is closely tied up with his mental health. Strains and stresses on the human nervous system caused by fear, hatred, worry, heat, cold, exhaustion and the like, are compensated for by something in the human make-up. The process is automatic and with marvelous adaptability the human being adjusts himself to whatever of these extremes he may encounter.

So efficient is the adaptive system built into us, that it frequently overdoes the job. The human body can take only so much, but the automatic stress regulator somehow goes ahead and makes us adjust apparently unharmed. But that isn't the case. The body itself rebels and sickness and death are the result.

In a typical reaction, suppose a man to be exposed to frequent fearful attacks—say, a soldier. His system reacts to fear by pouring in the adrenalin. Therefore he adapts to the fear. But under sufficient tension his adrenals become so overworked that a subsequent analysis shows that they've been shot to peices. This holds true for other apparatus than the adrenals.

This particular reaction of the human body is regarded as one of the most fundamental discoveries of recent times. So far no methods of combating this "fatigue-attack" have been discovered but then the new science is quite young.

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FAVORS CAN BE FATAL

By H. B. Hickey

What's a girl to do when she's being followed — especially when she hasn't the least idea she has something the guy wants bad enough to kill for?

I AWOKE, that typically chill Mars morning, with the hotel phone buzzing at me like an angry mother-in-law. There were a few seconds during which I couldn't tell if the buzzing was inside or outside my head, and then I snatched the phone off the stand.

"Sorry if we woke you, Mr. Kenton," the desk clerk said, not sounding sorry at all. "Space Patrol Headquarters is calling."

"Put 'em on," I grumbled, wondering what S.P. could want.

The next thing I heard was the mellifluous voice of Captain Max Baron: "Hello, Kylie. Heard you were in. How are you?"

"How could I be, at this hour of

The men weighed almost nothing at all, and I swung them against the wall. We were winning the fight

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the morning?"

"Join the S.P. and be fresh and alert at any hour. Good pay, long vacations and a chance for advancement." Before I could tell him to go to hell, he was off again. "Next time leave your number, bum, so I won't have to call all the dives."

"I'm sorry, Max. I was in a hurry."

"All right. A beer will make it up. Listen, Kylie, do me a favor?"

"Like what?"

"I hear you might be going on to Earth. Care to take a passenger?"

"No," I said. There was a long pause. I said, "Is it much of a favor?"

"Well, I'd appreciate it."

"All right," I said.

"Good, good. Next liner won't blast off for a week, you know, and I hate to have the girl wandering around by herself."

"Girl? Listen, Max—"

"You've already said you'd do it," he reminded me.

"Do me a favor, Max?" I asked.

"Like what?"

I told him. He listened very patiently. He clucked several times.

"You have a very dirty mouth, Kylie," he said. "And by the way, did you know it was a king of France who invented that game? Let me lend you my copy of Balzac's *Droll Tales* so you can read about it. Or should I tell you the story now?"

I was dog tired. I'd had a long haul from the planetoid I was working; and to top it off, I'd come too late for Harry Dillon's funeral. And now I had a passenger to Earth.

"Tell it to the clerk," I said, and started to hang up.

"Wait!"

"What now?"

"Dinner at five. On me."

"Deal," I said.

I went back to sleep thinking I was already hungry. But no matter what time I got up, I wasn't going to eat until dinner. It would cost Max a week's pay to feed me.

TWO MECHANICS were working on my ship when I got out to the field. Four cradles over was Harry Dillon's ship, S.P. seals slapped all over it. I stood for a minute and looked at it, remembering what a swell guy Harry had been.

"Rough," one of the mechanics said, jerking his head at the sealed ship.

"Yeah," I grunted.

"I hear one of the boys hit it rich," he said. "Who?" I asked, and he said, "I dunno. Rumor has it, that's all. Just one of those things on the 'vine. But real rich."

Well, Rumor could be right for once. It was always possible. Otherwise, fellows like Harry and the others and myself wouldn't be crawling around the A.B.—the Asteroid Belt.

"Hope you're right," I said, and went on over to Max's office.

Max was talking to someone on the Venus side of Mars, and he was getting angry in his nice, pleasant way. Just listening to that smooth, cultured voice on the phone might give someone the wrong impression of Max. But the impression would be corrected when you saw the thick neck the voice came from, and the bull shoulders and cocky jaw.

Max Baron was not a man I'd have liked to engage in hand to hand combat.

"Sit down, Kylie," he said, and got his beetling brows back down near the mouthpiece.

He listened to the phone a minute, getting redder in the face all the time. Suddenly, he banged the desk with a rocky fist.

"Listen, Sharik! Something tells me I'm getting the run around. And I don't like it, see? The next time I talk to you I want to hear something besides a sad story on the tribulations

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of a space cop's life. I want action! Do you get that? Do...you...get... that?" he said, banging the desk on each word.

Then, he hung up and swivelled back to me. "Bastards," he said.

Until Max had taken over the station, there had always been trouble between the Earth's side of Mars and the side the Venusians held. Now, it looked like there might be trouble brewing again.

"Harry?" I asked, jerking my head at the phone.

"Yes." Max gave me a dirty look. "If you guys would stop at the station when you pull in, instead of heading for those border dives, I wouldn't have to ask Sharik to help me find the man who did the dirty work!"

"Everybody was gone when I got here," I said. "Exactly what happened with Harry?"

"Exactly," Max grunted, "nobody knows. Everybody was drunk, supposedly. Also supposedly three men—whom nobody can identify, naturally —were helping Harry out the door when he pulled a knife. When my boys got there, Harry was cut to ribbons, and the men who did it had ducked over the Venus border."

"Harry Dillon never pulled a knife," I said.

"You telling me?" Max played with a paperweight, tossing it idly. "And my pal Sharik hasn't much to gain by hiding out a couple or three ordinary thugs. So why should he be doing it, huh?"

MAX DROPPED the weight and gave me a hard eye. "I intend to find out, Kylie."

Which left the matter in good hands. All of Max's muscle was not in his biceps, and when he decided to throw some weight around, it wouldn't be simply avoirdupois.

"I hear somebody rang the jackpot," I said.

Max got mad again. "You hear. I hear, too. Rumors, that's all."

"Could it have been Harry?"

"Maybe. They say he roared in with a gleam in his eye. But the gleam could also have been thirst or sex."

Max banged the desk again. "Damn it, you fellows are supposed to report a strike to me! If all you're interested in is wine and women, you should have stayed home and married a saloon keeper's daughter!"

Suddenly laughing, he threw up his hands. "Oh, hell. Listen, Kylie, I've got a court order to unseal Harry's ship for inspection. Anything on it that might belong to you?"

"Nothing, except some memories."

The desk phone rang and Max scooped it up. "Yes? Oh. Tell her to come in."

He dropped the phone and grinned at me. "I got news for you. I'll be too busy to buy you dinner. But you can buy one for someone else. How's that?"

"Drop dead."

"Too busy. Need any money?"

"No, thanks."

Then the door opened and the girl came in. Max jumped up and said, "Ah, Miss Crando. Miss Crando, Mr. Kenton—he's the man you'll fly with."

We had time to say our "'d'you do's" and then Max's phone rang again. He said, "Have a good time, kiddies," and we were on our way out.

As long as I was stuck, I might as well be stuck properly. I took Shirley Crando to the Interplan Club, which has a clear-view roof and a head waiter with X-ray eyes. He saw right straight through my bankbook.

"No admittance without a necktie, sir," he smirked.

I felt like a fool. I wanted to tell him off and take Shirley to a meal I

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could really afford, even if the waitress slapped the customers on the back. But Shirley was too fast.

"Here," she said, whipping off a filmy scarf. In a flash, she had it around my neck, all knotted up like a tie.

"The kind of girl who also carries a small mending kit, I suppose?" I grinned as we were ushered to our table.

"Of course." She snapped open her bag and there it was.

I GOT a heartful of warm, gray-eyed laughter, then, and all of a sudden I was no longer sore at Max Baron. I didn't even mind the cocktails, knowing what they'd cost, and after we had them down I said, "Care to dance?"

"I'm rather out of practice," she said, but let me lead her onto the floor.

She didn't need practice, as it turned out, but it was a fore-thoughtful way to take all the blame off me when I kept stepping on her toes.

I began to understand why Max didn't want her roaming around unescorted. A girl with a calendar-picture shape, a face like a valentine, and a blonde, page-boy bob that swirled perfume in my nostrils. And a very nice girl.

"What in the world—" I began.

She took it up. "—is a girl like me—"

We both laughed. Definitely, she would be safer in a more civilized place, where men were better able to suppress their baser desires because they were more used to suppressing them.

"I came to Mars to be married," Shirley said. We were walking back to our table.

"Oh?" I held her chair. "What happened?"

"My fiance died. Was killed, rather."

I practically fell into my own chair. For a minute, I just gasped at her. "Wait a second," I said. "You mean you're—?"

"Harry Dillon's girl."

The heat was beginning to run up into my face and down into my hands. The orchestra, the slick furnishings, the too expensively dressed people in the place—they all got hazy and far away.

"You're certainly taking it hard," I heard myself say. "You're just all broken up, aren't you?"

"No."

It was like a slap in the face, like cold water. "I like to keep the record straight," she said. "I don't know why, but it makes a difference what you think of me, so I'll tell you."

She went right on: "I met Harry two years ago, when he was back home. I thought he was wonderful, and I kept thinking I loved him even when I should have known better. So when I got his telegram asking me to come up to marry him, I came."

A napkin twisted in her fingers and she bit down on her lips. "And when I got here, Harry was dying in a hospital room, and I took one look at him and knew I'd never really loved him. But I said I did anyway, because it was the only thing to do at such a time.

"And then..." The napkin dropped. "...and then, Kylie, I was sorry he'd died, but no sorrier than for any other nice person. I can't help that, can I?"

I didn't say anything in reply, and she flared up.

"Or should I have got drunk, like his friends did? Like you probably would have done, too, if you'd got here in time? Got drunk and told stories and got drunker and cried."

My seat was solid on the chair again. I looked straight at her and

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said: "Maybe Harry's friends don't cry well when they're sober."

"I never thought of that," she said, a little bit humble. "I'm sorry."

"Just for the record," I told her. "Now, let's dance some more." As far as I was concerned, the record was straight both ways.

WHEN THE big boy with the white grin and the snappy drape tapped me on the shoulder, I knew something was wrong. The Interplan is not the kind of place where you cut in on a dance.

I'd noticed him before, sitting at a nearby table with two other sharpsters and a round-faced Venusian. They might have been businessmen, but they weren't. They were a quartet that some time Max Baron would put the blocks to, as soon as he had the copper-riveted case he needed.

People like Al Baker and Imman-sha are always tough to convict, though. They have fall guys. And the witnesses needed hate to admit their own peculiar foibles to the police.

"Mind if I cut in?" Baker said, and started to do it. He grinned at Shirley and said, "Miss Crando." Very suave.

Shirley hesitated and Baker said, "You remember Captain Baron introducing us?"

But she plainly didn't remember any such thing. I said, "Beat it, Baker."

In the meantime, we had drifted close to Baker's table. Until too late, I didn't realize that. And then there was one man less at the table and there was a gun hard against my back.

"You sit at the table," Baker told me. "She goes out with me. Or else she gets hurt."

A kidnapping! And they might have got away with it. It was just the kind of barefaced thing that could succeed.

But that gun was by necessity too close to my back.

When I whirled, it was shoved aside. I hit the man with the gun first. By that time, Baker had Shirley's arm and was trying to drag her after him. Imman-sha and the other hoodlum were coming out of their seats.

I tipped their table into them and nailed Baker on the back of the neck. He let go of Shirley.

And that was where my luck began to run out. I began to catch more than I pitched; not quite four to one, but the ratio was bad enough.

When the space cop came in, I was at the stage where it was all foes and no friends to me. I was throwing wild, at everyone in sight. Even when the opposition vanished, I kept swinging.

Suddenly, a hard hand spun me around. "Stop it!" a hard voice barked. I swung and hit something and that something automatically hit me back.

He must have thought he had me stopped. He was wide open when I brought one up from my knees. And until he hit the floor, I didn't realize he was S.P.

Even friends of Max Baron can't slug his men and get away with it. And this one was too still and white. I'd really hit him.

But even as it was, it might not have been too bad. If only the second S.P. man hadn't come in. He took one look at me standing over the first one and jumped forward, grabbing for his gun.

The gun stuck in its holster.

He ran right into my fist and then there were two of them down. And I was running like crazy, with the whole Club going in shouts and screams, and Shirley holding onto me.

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THE MECHANICS were working on another ship now, and there was a small knot around Harry Dillon's, which had its hatch open. I could see Max's burly form start down the ladder as I raced toward the cradle.

I might have stopped even then, but just at that point someone stuck his head out of the S.P. building and yelled, "There's Kenton! Grab him!"

Bad news travels fast, I thought. That is, if I was really capable of thinking at all.

I slammed the hatch shut after us and banged the horns to let them know I was really taking off, and all the while shouting to Shirley to get her belt good and tight. And then we were on our way.

We levelled off at 60,000 and slanted over toward the lower edge of Phobos, which was already riding high. It was the first chance I had to take a deep breath.

Shirley couldn't do even that. Her dress was ripped at the shoulder, barely hanging by a thread. A sudden movement and her neckline would be lower than her navel. It was nice to know art hadn't belied nature, but that wasn't the time for such things.

"Better get your mending kit," I said. And then I had to laugh, because in all the excitement she had managed to hold onto her purse. Just like a woman.

"Why didn't you stay put?" I asked over my shoulder. "I kept yelling for you to let go. Once the S. P. showed up, you were safe."

"S.P.?" she asked dumbly. "I didn't see any Space Patrolmen."

She'd seen them, but hadn't known it. Only men on regular ground duty wore uniforms all the time. The boys on flight call generally didn't, because regulation uniform didn't fit well under a space suit.

So she'd thought the last two were just part of the Al Baker mob.

"You are now an accessory after—an unpleasant fact," I told her. "That fellow looked ripe for embalming."

"But you didn't mean to hurt him. I'm sure when we get to Earth—"

"Ha!" I said.

I turned on the radio and sure enough the call was already out. Max Baron, in his most official tones, was demanding that I, Kylie Kenton, return immediately.

And to all S.P. ships aloft, he announced that Kylie Kenton was believed heading for Earth and was to be taken alive. So friendship meant a litle something. It could have been "dead or alive".

Because Max was wrong about me heading for Earth, I might have considerable time. But only twenty minutes of it, used in some logical thought, showed me I wasn't going to get cooler and would certainly get hotter if I kept running.

Sure, I could drop Shirley with one of the boys in the A.B. He'd take her back to Mars and I'd keep going. But to where? I kicked the ship around and Shirley heaved a sigh of relief.

"That's intelligent," she said. "And after all, maybe you didn't kill him."

It was a pleasant hope. But the radio dispelled it within minutes, on Max's next call. The man was dead. And because I'd hit the second one, I didn't even have a chance on manslaughter.

So it meant five years at least. And five years was too long.

"Call in," Shirley begged as I swung around again. "Maybe if you explain, with me to testify in your favor—"

"If I call in, they'll know where I am," I said.

Shirley began to cry. It wasn't her fault; I could still be objective enough to see that. And yet, if it hadn't been

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for her, it never would have happened. Women and trouble may not be necessarily connected, but the probability tends toward certainty.

WITH ALL the things on my mind, it was no wonder I didn't see the green ship until it was very close. And exactly at the moment I saw it, there was a blast across my path.

"The Patrol!" Shirley yelped.

But it wasn't the Patrol. Their ships are not green. And it wasn't the Venusian Patrol either, because their ships are yellow.

Which left one possibility: Al Baker and Imman-sha. They were just the boys to have a blaster on their ship. And they were shrewd enough to have guessed which way I'd be heading.

"They shot at us!" Shirley said.

"Warning to stop," I explained. "They intend to board us. Better fasten your belt again."

At least she didn't ask foolish questions. She got her belt on as fast as she could.

Meantime I cut power and then retarded, which left us drifting with Baker's ship cutting over above us. And then, just as they dropped for a grapple, I shot the power back on and dove under them.

It was a fast maneuver. By the time they could swing over and get a sight on me, I was hundreds of miles away and going like a bat.

They had a blaster, but they didn't have any more speed and probably a good deal less maneuverability. My ship had been designed for work around tiny asteroids and planetoids, theirs for bigger scale operations, like maybe smuggling.

While I hightailed for the Belt, I told Shirley who was after us. She shook her head in bewilderment.

"What could they want of me?"

"Bodies less pure and white than yours have fetched some fancy prices," I hazarded. "But they're taking a lot of chances for yours. More than usual."

"Can't you call for help?" she asked, blushing.

"And get picked up by S.P.? Anyway, in a little while we'll lose them."

The Belt was coming on fast as I booted the ship along. Stuff began to whiz past the viewports with fair regularity. Baker was going to have to watch his step, but for me this was home territory. In another ten minutes, Baker was going to feel like the carnival boy with his head stuck through the hole in the canvas and all the customers throwing at once.

"Pretty, isn't it?" I asked.

She shuddered. "And this is where you and the others work?"

"It's a living. And every once in a while someone makes a big strike."

"But what can you find?"

"Everything. It's all chunks of planetary matter. Same stuff we'd be looking for on Earth if all of Earth hadn't already been staked out. Used to be precious metals, some of the heavy stuff like uranium. Now, with the new atomic rocket drives they've developed, it's stuff like cadmium and thorium."

"Thorium," Shirley said.

"What?"

"Thorium. Harry kept babbling about it. I thought he was delirious, getting his words mixed up."

"What about it? Thorium, I mean."

"I don't know. Something about solid thorium, nothing but thorium, pure thorium, whole damn planetoid of thorium. Just on and on like that."

"My god!" I said. "So there was a big strike. And it was Harry!" My heart was pounding crazily. A whole planetoid! It was the biggest thing that had ever happened.

And it was big in more ways than

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one. It could upset the balance of power between Earth and Venus. Whichever side got hold of that much rocket fuel for the new drives would possess an immense advantage. So much of an advantage that the possessor would be tempted to use it.

It could mean interplanetary war. Or, used properly, it could be of tremendous benefit.

"What else did Harry say?" I demanded. "Did he say where he'd found it?"

Shirley shook her head. "Just what I've told you. The rest was just wild gibberish." She said, "Would that be a lot? I thought asteroids were pretty small."

"Plenty. Figure the mass of a sphere even fifty miles in diameter and you'll see that it could be darned impure, as far as thorium is concerned, and still be worth plenty."

ALL OF that was in my mind as we drove down for the planetoid where Sam Echols was working. The reason for Harry's murder was clear enough, as was the reason why Baker and Imman-sha were so hot after Shirley.

Harry hadn't spilled all the beans, and they thought Shirley might know the location of the planetoid he'd been working. Once they had that, they'd never work it, but simply sell out to Earth or Venus, whichever bid higher.

Only they weren't going to get Shirley. Sam Echols would take her back to Mars while I decoyed them in the other direction. Then I'd give them the slip and head for some place where I could hide out until the S.P. had cooled off and Shirley could give my side of the story.

It was a great idea. But it didn't pan out.

Sam Echols was dead.

I knew something was wrong as soon as I landed. Sam's ship had an air of loneliness, an undefinable thing only a spaceman might sense.

"What's the matter?" Shirley asked as I zippered my space suit on. It was obvious I didn't need a gun in my hand to cross fifty feet to Sam's ship.

"I don't know," I muttered.

But I found out. I found out as soon as I stepped into the open hatchway of Sam's ship.

His body was lying just inside. And it wasn't pretty. He had been worked over before they'd killed him.

There wasn't a chance any life remained in that torn flesh, in those broken bones, but I had to make sure. I was bending over Sam when Shirley came in behind me.

My extra suit hung on her like a sack, and for a moment I thought she was going to keel over. But she wasn't the fainting kind. Her communicator was on and I heard her make a retching sound. Then she steadied herself.

"Looks like Baker has another ship out," I said. "He's playing all angles, hoping one of the boys might know where Harry'd been working."

And then the thought struck me that no one except myself knew what was going on. Baker's ships would pick off the rest one by one. They'd never have a chance.

I had to warn them somehow. And I had to do it without giving myself away.

Switching on Sam's sender, I gave the best imitation I could of his voice, high and nasal.

"S.E. calling all hands. S.E. calling all hands. Meet at once at QN4a. Meet at once at QN4a. Pass the word along. Acknowledge."

I said that eight or nine times before I got an acknowledgment from Larry Dale. He came in good and strong.

"L.D. calling. Got it, S.E. Will pass it."

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THERE WAS no sign of Baker and Imman-sha as we took off, for which I was thankful. I wanted to get to that planetoid as fast as possible.

"What was that code you were using?" Shirley asked. "That stuff about QN something?"

"QN4a," I said. "It's our way of dividing up the Asteroid Belt. The capital letters are longitude, the numbers latitude, and the small letters represent radiants from the sun."

"QN4a," Shirley mused. "I thought it was gibberish."

"Why should I talk gibberish?" I demanded.

"Not you. Harry. He kept saying letters and numbers."

I forgot all about the ship. I swung away from the controls, my heart hammering away inside me. "What letters? What numbers?"

"I can't recall."

She buried her face in her hands. "Oh, I'm so stupid! He must have repeated it ten times. And I can't remember."

She was feeling so low, I just naturally put my arm around her shoulder. "Spilled milk," I said. "How did you know it was going to be important?"

Somehow, my arm didn't want to lift again. I kept it where it was, feeling her soft and warm under it, and Shirley made no move to get out from under.

And then, it hit me, burning my insides, running hot and dry and pounding in my throat. I literally swept her off her feet and pulled her to me and kissed her until my lips hurt.

When we broke I didn't know what to expect, a slap across the face, a kick in the shins, or just cold contempt. It was none of those. She just stood a second, staring at me, wetting her lips.

"I—I was hoping you'd do that," she said at last. Her eyes dropped. "Does that sound terrible?"

I was so angry, I almost choked on my words.

"No! What's terrible is your luck! Just the way you pick them, that's all. Your first choice has to get himself killed; your second winds up on the lam, like a cheap crook."

"Lam," Shirley said.

"That's you. Lamb to the slaughter," I told her. "If you ever get out of this, you ought to get yourself a guy whose other pair of pants are nailed to an office chair."

"Lam, not lamb," Shirley said. "LM, like in lam. LM3d."

She began to tremble, her eyes shining. "It came to me, Kylie! It must be the way my mind works. That's what Harry kept saying. LM3d. Does that make sense?"

I didn't know. Not offhand, anyway. LM3d was pretty far out. If there was anything there, it would be darned cold, stuck deep between Mars and Jupiter.

But on the other hand, Harry Dillon had always liked the long shots. It could just as well be said that this one had paid off.

"Let's find out," I said.

And then I took out as much insurance on the deal as I could. I flipped on my sender and again gave my best imitation of Sam Echols, hoping that at least one of the boys would catch it.

"S. E. calling. Change to LM3d."

THERE WAS something there, all right. A tremendous rock, more square than round, floating dreamily and turning ever so slowly because it was trapped in the three-way pull of Mars, Jupiter and the sun.

Fifty miles in diameter, I figured, but when I started to figure the mass, I was just too tired. It had taken us five hours to make the jaunt, and

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five hours through the Belt is nobody's idea of a rest.

With a rotation once in forty-eight hours, the sun side might warm up a good deal, but even so the loss by radiation in a body so small would be considerable. I'd been right about it being a darned cold place to work at best.

Swinging around it three times, I saw no indications that Harry had been there. I was beginning to shake my head in disgust. Shirley had remembered wrong.

And then, just at the edge of the twilight zone, in a jumble of double shadows caused by sunlight and reflected light from Jupiter, I got a glimpse of a white flag. Once more over the spot and it wasn't a white flag any longer, but a blaze of white paint on the rocky surface—Harry Dillon's mark.

"Keno, baby!" I yelped.

I set the ship down as though it were a carton of eggs, smack against a wall of rock a hundred feet high, where we'd get a measure of reflected light. I stepped up the heat packs in our space suits.

"Let's go," I said, and the big boring drill was light as a feather in my hands.

It was cold, all right, even in sunlight. But I had that drill going fast and deep. A pile of fine shavings grew around my feet, and I didn't even need a spectroscope to tell me what I was hitting. The stuff ran in veins, like seams of coal.

"You're rich, honey," I said.

Shirley shook her head. "It was Harry who found it."

"He never recorded it. And you're the one he tried to tell. I guess you've got it two ways, possession and inheritance."

I went into the ship and got a stake and a big triangle of cloth and put Shirley's name and the date on it. I was carrying it out when the shadow drifted across the ground.

It was Baker and Imman-sha.

THE BIG ship with the blaster stayed up above to cover me, pinning me there against the rock wall, and the smaller ship swooped down. Four men scampered out and covered me with small arms, and then the big ship landed alongside us.

Baker was the first one out, and there was triumph and gloating in his voice as he said, "Thanks, Kenton."

I was still so befuddled, I couldn't talk. I'd lost Baker way back there. And I was sure the smaller ship hadn't picked me up along the way. How had they found me, then?

Baker answered that for me. "You forget we knew there was no more Sam Echols," he laughed. "That last one was a short message, but it was just long enough so that with two ships out we could get a fix on you. It didn't take much luck to pick you up after that, and we were on your tail all the rest of the way."

"You talk too much, Baker," Imman-sha snapped, coming alongside him. Even in his space suit, the Venusian looked like a barrel. "Let's get our stakes out and get rid of him and the girl."

"Just him," Baker laughed.

He was so happy, he relaxed for a second. There were some twenty feet between the three of us, and on Mars or Earth I could never have reached them before they could get their guns on me.

But this was a tiny planetoid, without any gravity to speak of. I was used to conditions like that and they weren't.

I kicked out like a swimmer off the end of a pool. Only no swimmer ever had that kind of speed.

I hit them both, my arms outspread,

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and banged them into the rock wall. We went down in a heap, but only for a moment. I was around and up, my back to the wall and both of them in front of me for shields. They weighed almost nothing at all.

"Get in the ship!" I yelled to Shirley. She got in a hurry.

But the instant I pulled away from that wall, Baker's men were after me. They couldn't shoot, but they came around from all sides. The next thing I knew, there was another heap and I was on the bottom of this one.

I was on the bottom and then on top again. Suddenly, there was a great deal more swinging and all of it wasn't against me. Somehow, I got out of the pile and pulled back against the wall.

There were three more ships down. Three small ones, just like mine. The boys had landed.

The odds were still against us, but only numerically. Experience was on our side on terrain where every upward movement threatened to turn into a leap without a landing.

There was too much confusion to allow any shooting, another circumstance in our favor. We might have made it. We were making it.

That's when Colonel Sharik arrived.

BRIGHT yellow, the Venusian Patrol ship was. A big baby, two hundred feet long and with the new thorium drive. The latest thing in space ships, equipped even with an outside speaker system.

The speakers blasted, commanding us to stop fighting, and the sound was like thunder. We stopped, a bunch of statues watching the huge thing settle.

Colonel Sharik was the first one out, flanked by a couple of his Patrolmen with automatic pellet guns.

"Stay where you are," he ordered us. Then, he turned around and waved toward his ship.

Two men came out, carrying stakes and flags. They pounded the stakes in, set up the flags and wrote something down in a book.

"There," Colonel Sharik said. "Now."

He walked over to Imman-sha and swiped him across the helmet, knocking the Venusian down.

"Scum," Sharik said. "Did you think you were fooling me, that I couldn't have picked you up at any time? Did you think I allowed you to remain at large simply so I could have difficulties with Baron?

"Well," he sighed, "sometimes a rat must be allowed some freedom, so he can be followed to the grain bin."

Very calmly, he unholstered his pistol and pointed it at Imman-sha.

"You have done your last disservice to your native planet," Sharik said. "And your last service, unwilling as it was."

He pulled the trigger, the heavy pellet ripping Imman-sha's suit wide open and doing the same to the Venusian inside the suit. It was not a pleasant sight.

"For the rest of you," Sharik said, turning toward us, "there is no personal enmity, you understand. Simply a matter of expedience. We must have an uncontested claim to this planetoid."

He backed away from us, clearing out of the line of fire. My stomach tightened into a hard knot.

Sharik could get away with it. He was smart enough for that. Whatever explanation he'd give later would be a good one, and there'd be nobody to dispute it.

He was out of the way now and the two men with the automatic rifles were getting set, bringing them to bear on us. Then, a man came out of Sharik's ship.

"Colonel!" he called sharply.

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Sharik turned around. "What is it?"

"Radio from Captain Baron. He is coming in for a landing."

We all looked up at once. There was a tiny speck in the sky. But it was growing bigger every second. I was almost crying with relief.

NEVER in my life have I been as happy to see a man. But Max was paying no attention to anyone but Colonel Sharik.

"You'll excuse my caution, Colonel," he said, jerking his head upward to where his ship drifted above us. "My men have orders to blast away at the first sign of trouble."

"Your caution is quite unnecessary," Sharik said suavely.

"Brother!" I gasped, catching my breath at last. "You don't know how close this was!"

"Your own damned fault," Max snapped. "Why didn't you come back when I put out that call?"

"With that Patrolman dead?"

"Nobody's dead," Max snorted. "Except you, from the ears up. What did you want me to say? Come back, all is forgiven? And tip everyone off?"

He shrugged his heavy shoulders angrily. "And if we hadn't found that ore sample in Dillon's ship when we unsealed it, we still wouldn't know what was going on."

"But why tell your patrols to look for me toward Earth?"

"Because I didn't have any ships out, so what could I lose? And that way I knew for sure you'd head in the other direction. The only way I ever get anything from you fellows is to ask you to do the opposite," he sneered.

"But how did you find us?" I asked, disregarding his tone.

"With four ships, including Sharik's, reported heading in this direction? How could I miss?"

Colonel Sharik interrupted: "Too bad such good work must go unrewarded," he said sweetly. "It is unfortunate that Venus has prior claim to this planetoid."

"You have like—" I shouted.

"What about Dillon?" Max asked.

"He never recorded a claim, did he?" Sharik asked. "Besides, if you'll notice the date on those flags, you'll see that they were set up nine days ago."

"Of all the barefaced lies!" I gasped.

"You are lying, Sharik," Max snapped.

Sharik shrugged. "At the moment, you have the power to kill us all, Captain. But if it should come to a dispute before the Mediation Board, I think my word and that of my men will carry more weight than Kenton's or the others."

"You're not going to let him get away with that?" I demanded.

"Unfortunately, I'm not the Law," Max said heavily. "I only represent it. And unless I want to start a war, I have to give Sharik's claim at least the same credence as yours."

"You are an honorable man," Sharik bowed.

"No, I'm just tied up, that's all. If it was up to me, I'd pull your flags up."

MAX REALLY meant it. He was going to let Sharik put in a claim. From his point of view, there was nothing else he could do. He was acting in his official capacity.

"Wait a minute," I said. "What if I can prove Sharik is lying?"

"I'd take those flags down and break them into toothpicks," Max said.

"This is ridiculous," Sharik sneered. "I demand I be allowed to leave at once."

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"You stay here," Max said. "Go on, Kylie. How can you prove it?"

"He picked the wrong day."

"What?"

"Nine days ago is no good. Ten days or eight would have been all right. But not nine."

I turned to Sharik. "You see, the speed of rotation of this planetoid is such that nine days ago this would have been the dark side. It's not only illogical that someone would work the dark side, but almost impossible."

I pointed around at everyone. "Look! We're chattering with cold even on this side. I challenge Colonel Sharik to stay out of his ship on the other side long enough to bore some test holes and plant a couple of flags."

There was a long silence. Max Baron looked at Sharik and said, "Well?"

The colonel sighed. "I am afraid my career is about to suffer a setback. Too bad I didn't think of that."

"Yeah," Baron said. "Tough."

Sharik shivered. "It is cold, isn't it? Well, I'll be going."

"Not yet," Max told him. "You stay here."

He nodded his head to me. "I guess it's your baby, Kylie. Unless someone else wants to put in a claim."

Nobody did, and Baron said, "Then be on your way. When you get it recorded properly, send out a call so we can clear off this damn rock."

"All right," I said. "But it's not mine. The flags say Shirley Crando."

Except for one more thing, that was all there was to it. Five minutes later, Shirley and I were a long way off, heading for Mars and the recording office.

I set the controls so I could light up a smoke. Shirley came over and put her arms around me.

"The excitement's over," I said. "You don't have to do that."

"I know. But I like it."

"Anyway," I said, "you are now a wealthy woman. And I'm a poor man."

"Wrong again. It's community property between man and wife. You don't think I'm going to let you get away, do you?"

I kissed her. I'd been wrong. The excitement wasn't over.

THE BIG BLOWHARD

By MILTON MATTHEW

AS EVERYONE knows, research on guided missiles and high speed aircraft is one of the major efforts of scientists today. If every project required a wind-tunnel, the country would be covered with them. Well, most projects do require them, but for wind-tunnels, scientists substitute falling bodies, in a neat and ingenious variation on an old theme.

In an effort to study wing-shapes, instrumentation, the form and function of missile-bodies and a host of other knotty aeronautical difficulties, technicians are reverting to the simple and obvious method of throwing their design overboard from a plane at great heights, and letting it thus acquire huge speeds. Instruments built into the falling projectile radio back the desired information and the designer gets his dope without the bother of a five or six hundred miles an hour wind tunnel. Automatic parachute attachments lower the projectile in the end portion of its fall, gently to Earth where further examination can be made.

The value of this research can't beoverestimated. A rocket or jet propelled missile consumes fuel like a hungry lion. Each bit of streamlining and lowered resistance which can be added, makes the gadget that much more effective. Most of the projectiles are designed to deliver the knockout punch to invading bombers which manage to slip through the standard fighter-radar screen. The missiles track them down automatically and destroy them. Hence it is imperative that they be perfectly designed.

Little tricks in the economy of research, such as this one of using the air as a wind-tunnel, are finding increasing favor since so much effort and money must be devoted to those matters. If researchers didn't watch the bank-roll, they could bust the Government!

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The officer doubled up with sudden pain as the bolt of energy hit his stomach...

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They knew he was a killer, and yet he carried no weapons. They didn't know that—

SOME DO IT WITH A LOOK...

By P. F. Costello

WHEN THEY brought this prisoner in, the cops were slobbering mad. They had seen their dead.

Old Joe Glotz, still a patrolman after twenty-eight years on the force, lying on the sidewalk with a bullet through his stomach, deader than a doorknob.

So the police, who hate nothing worse than they hate a cop-killer, had some provocation. They are human and it seems to be a human trait to kick the next dog that comes along after you have been bitten, and not to try too hard to get the dog that did the biting. Any dog will do.

What they brought in and booked under the name of John Robert Howard certainly looked like the human variety of plain alley cur. About eighteen, he had long tangled black hair, and an acne rash on fuzzy cheeks that had not yet known the edge of a razor. He wore a ragged sweater, a fancy pair of pants that had apparently been salvaged out of some ash can, tennis shoes, and no socks. Blood was still running from a cut on his forehead, one eye was almost closed, his sweater was torn, and they had him manacled between two plainclothes detectives, Brantwell and Cox. Brantwell was a great lumbering ox of a man, about six feet two and weighing about 220, every pound of which was mean. Cox

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was a bantam, but what he lacked in size, he more than made up in sadistic impulses.

Of all the things that could happen to me, the last thing on earth I would want to happen would be for these two detectives to catch me in some law violation that a ten-spot would not square. Brother, I would sure go quietly.

Looking at the condition of their knuckles, I had a pretty good idea of what had happened to this cur kid and I wondered what his body looked like under that torn sweater.

They crowded him up to the desk. The sergeant on duty, who was not a bad guy if you bought him a cigar once in a while, frowned at the marks on the kid. "You expect me to book him like that?"

"He resisted arrest," Cox said, indignantly. Probably the local strong arm squad was using this alibi back in the stone age but it's still good. At least it's still used, though not so often around this particular police station any more. "Name is John Robert Howard, age eighteen, no address, he said."

The desk man wrote it down. "We're booking him for doing in Joe Glotz," Cox continued.

So far as the desk sergeant was concerned, this did it. After that charge, he didn't have any sympathy left.

There had been some excitement around headquarters when the flash went out over the radio, "Officer in need of assistance." But we had known nothing more about the situation until they brought in this kid. But every newspaper man who had ever covered the night police beat will know what happened the instant that call went out. Nothing gets a cop's teeth so badly on edge as that "Officer in need of assistance" call. Every cop figures that the time may come when he is the officer in need of assistance, when he is down and a killer's gun is blazing at him, and he likes to figure that even if he goes along, his buddies will collect something for him. Anyhow, whatever the reason may be, they always try to collect something.

When Cox said, "We're booking him for doing in Joe Glotz," the gin rummy game in the pressroom broke up. The photographer went first, the rest of us followed. Maybe it wasn't big news but it was always good for a front page splash—Cop Killed. There would be pictures of the cop's body, his weeping wife, his kids.

UP UNTIL now, Brantwell and Cox had been so mad that they had forgotten this was a picture-on-the-front-page proposition. You should have seen them straighten themselves up and put fighting grins on their face when the photog came running.

The kid, in between them, kind of cringed down.

"I didn't do it," he said, over and over again, as if he hoped somebody would hear and believe him. But nobody did.

"It was like this," Cox spoke. He was speaking to us, now, to the working press. "We got the flash, see, and we was on the scene in maybe two minutes. Officer Glotz was down on the sidewalk. He just had the strength to point up an alley. 'He's up there, boys, go get him.'"

You could see his chest expand six inches as he spoke. "We went in there and we got him. He was hiding behind an ash pit. We brought him out."

That's the way he told it, I wonder how it actually happened. He made it sound as if a couple of Siegfrieds had gone in against a dragon, but I can't imagine these two bully boys going up a dark alley looking for an armed

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killer. I can imagine them hearing a noise in an alley and waiting in hiding until a kid came out and they were able to tell for sure it was a kid, and then jumping on him with both feet. That picture doesn't strain my imagination even a little. But this going into a dark alley and facing a gun— .

Only it developed that the kid didn't have a gun. "He must have thrown it away," Brantwell said. "We got him dead to rights. Hiding behind the ash pit, he was, not twenty feet from old Joe's dead body. And he resisted arrest. Put that in."

"Only I didn't do it," the kid protested. "I didn't do anything. I just heard a shot and got scared. I hid—and somebody ran past me. Honest—"

"Shut up, you!" Brantwell said. With his free hand, he hit the kid across the mouth.

"Okay, boys," the desk sergeant said. "The basement ain't occupied right now. Probably you'll want to talk to him down there, since he don't seem to want to tell the truth."

A suspected cop killer doesn't get much sympathy.

The last I saw of Brantwell and Cox they were dragging the kid down the basement stairs. We didn't follow them, knowing we wouldn't be welcome. They didn't want any witnesses. We filed the story. Back in the press room the gin rummy game started up again. The first muted scream came from down below.

"They've tied his hands behind his back and strung him up on a door," Fentiger said. Fentiger was a Star man, and a little on the nervous side. "Now they're beating him across the stomach with a baseball bat." This was not exactly news to any of us in the press room, but Fentiger seemed to want to talk and we let him.

This baseball bat across the stomach is not standard practice and it is not likely to happen to you. The honest citizen caught in mild wrongdoing gets pretty decent treatment from the cops as long as he doesn't shoot off his mouth too much. He can yell to his alderman and to his lawyer. But when a kid comes in, wearing poor clothes, with an obvious background of poverty...

The scream came again. We played gin rummy. I discarded two aces in succession and Fentiger grabbed both of them and yelled "Gin." There were no more screams.

A couple of bully boys in blue who had been loafing in the press room went down to get in on the confession and maybe hit a lick or two of their own. They came back up the steps on the dead run, heading for the desk sergeant. He listened to them for a moment, then all three lit out for the basement. We went along. The fact that the prisoner had confessed was worth a subhead.

The sweat room wasn't impressive, it was just a big room beside the furnace. It had a concrete floor and walls made of brown tile and a big closet with a heavy door. The closet door was open. The kid was strung up on the door all right, his whole weight borne on his hands, which were tied behind his back. This treatment was old, they haven't thought up anything new in this line in several centuries, or needed to.

The kid was alive, I could see the rise and fall of his chest, but he was unconscious; fainted, I suppose, from the pain.

Brantwell was there, on the floor. The bat lay just beyond the reach of his outstretched fingers, as if he had been getting ready to strike another blow with it when something had happened to make him lose interest in this sort of activity.

Or in any other activity.

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Brantwell was dead.

COX WAS across the room, huddled up against the tile wall as if he had tried to run and had got so far when something had reached out and had tapped him on the shoulder, the long arm of the law perhaps, only it wasn't any law that men have written into any of the statute books.

Cox was dead too.

From where I stood, I never saw two prettier corpses, two men who were such logical and beautiful candidates for the attention of an undertaker. I felt like cheering. Maybe I'm part ghoul deep down inside, maybe it's my duty as a citizen to stick up for the cops—and I *am* willing to stick up for a lot of cops I know—but I never saw a more pleasing sight in my life than these two detectives—dead.

On the door the kid moaned and recovered consciousness. His eyes were wild. His gaze came down to the two bodies on the floor and to the faces staring up at him.

"I—I didn't mean to kill them," he moaned. "But they were hurting me so bad—" He passed out again.

It got so quiet you could hear the sweat dripping off a cop's chin and hitting the floor.

Upstairs, somebody who sounded like a lieutenant yelled for the desk sergeant, but nobody seemed to notice the yell. The cops were looking at each other and at the kid on the door and at the two bodies on the floor. They had seen dead men before, they knew one when they saw him, or two, for that matter. They knew Brantwell and Cox were dead. But the desk sergeant checked. He dropped down to his knees and felt for a heart beat in Brantwell's body. He kept right on feeling.

You could see the wheels going round in the sergeant's head. Brantwell and Cox were dead and the kid had said he hadn't meant to kill them. This meant, if words mean anything, that he had killed them.

But he was up there on that door, in the process of getting his guts beaten out. He had no weapon, there was no way for him to use a weapon if he had had one. Therefore his statement that he had killed them meant nothing. It was torture talking.

But Brantwell and Cox were dead.

We could assume the kid had been driven nuts by torture....

But Brantwell and Cox were dead.

We could make one more safe assumption—that we were nuts.

But we knew better. We were no nuttier than usual.

The pattern, no matter how we twisted it, would not fit the fabric of the facts. A kid being tortured and the two cops who had been torturing him—dead. These were the facts. If he had killed them, how had he done it?

One of the cops crossed himself. "The evil eye..." he whispered.

They were running down the same old blind alley again. You get a pattern where the facts don't fit together and immediately you jump into superstition to explain something that is not otherwise explainable. For half a million years, in moments of strain and stress, the human mind has been running down this blind alley.

"I knew a feller once, who knew a feller who had the eye...." The cop was building it up. In a few more moments he could have built it up to the point where all of them believed that the kid up on the door was the devil himself.

The human mind demands a pattern it can understand. If the pattern cannot be produced because all the facts are not available, the mind creates a pattern of its own.

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This is insanity but having a label for it doesn't help the facts much.

"Where the hell is the desk man?" the voice up the stairs roared again. Probably the sergeant didn't really hear it this time but he responded to it. Walking like a man in a dream, he went out the door.

WE LEARNED later that the lieutenant wanted him to book a man who had just been brought in, a hop-head who was also a burglar and who had been caught with a gun in his pocket.

Here is where I got to be a hero of sorts. I untied the ropes that held the kid over the door. I dug the keys for the cuffs out of Brantwell's pocket and unlocked them and threw them as hard as I could against the wall. Then I picked up the kid and carried him up to the cell block and put him in the first empty cell.

The cops and the press men followed right behind me. They didn't try to stop me, they didn't try to do anything. They were a little on the uneasy side.

The kid moaned as I laid him down. His arms had almost been pulled out of their sockets and he might have some broken ribs. Brantwell might have got a little high with that bat.

They had already sent for the medico who doubles as the coroner in our city administrative set-up and he would have looked at the kid. I said to hell with that and went out and called my own mind and medicine man, Dr. Earnest Calvard. Something in the tone of my voice must have told him that I wanted him badly. He came right away. Police Chief Ermal Lindquist was not in the station this night and nobody else objected to Dr. Calvard seeing this patient.

Dr. Calvard made a quick examination. "What happened to him?" he asked quickly.

"A little case of crucification," I said. I told him what had happened. His lips closed together in a line like a knife. Dr. Calvard was a young fellow, fresh out of medical college, but he had brains under his hair and he had something else which I liked—a warm human compassion.

"There may be internal bleeding. He has to be removed to a hospital at once."

"Sure," I said. It was all right with me. It was all right with everybody, except one man, and he had just arrived—Police Chief Ermal Lindquist.

Lindquist had been a cop for as long as a man could remember. He had been police chief for twenty years and he figured he owned the department and a good chunk of the city as well. Come to think of it, maybe he did. I knew of four bookie joints that were paying him protection money and I don't know how many slots were operating in our fair city, which meant more money running through his paws. During prohibition, he had been a detective and he had banked his entire salary. Of course, he didn't get to keep all his take, politicians above him took their cut, a horde of small fry below him also knew where the body was buried and had to be paid off. But he had kept enough of it to buy two apartment houses and a big farm down state.

Cox had been his son-in-law.

Also, my paper had been riding the chief. We had published lists of bookie joints that were open, we had run the addresses of the ice cream parlors where the kids were playing the slots. Because of this, he loved us about as well as he would have loved a hole in the head. When he learned I had carried the kid upstairs and had called my own doctor and was asking that the kid be taken to the hospital, that was all there was

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to it for him.

"He killed a policeman, didn't he? Hell, no, he's not going to any hospital! He's going to stay right here, under double-guard, until he is brought to trial. Our own doctor can work on him if he got a little bunged-up resisting arrest."

Well, that is the way it is in this world sometimes. I wonder if there is another world somewhere. If it exists, I would kind of like to go live in it. I'm pretty sick of this one. Dr. Calvard tried to raise the roof but it didn't get him anywhere.

AT THIS point, the coroner came up the stairs and reported that Brantwell had died of a heart attack and that Cox had died from the same cause. Of course, the chief already knew that these men were dead, but something about the coroner's report seemed to set him off.

"Three policemen dead, and all because of that damned kid! I'll fix that son—"

A purple tinge appeared on the chief's jowls. He snatched a night-stick from the hands of a cop and headed toward the bank of cells at the rear.

We followed him. Nobody tried to stop him, nobody tried to argue with him, nobody tried to tell him he couldn't do what he so obviously intended to do—finish the job that Brantwell and Cox had started.

The kid had come to. He was sitting up in the bunk, his face and eyes sick. The chief opened the cell door and walked right up to him. He had the nightstick behind his back. His face was beaming.

"My boy, what have they done to you?" His voice dripped oil, it dripped false sympathy and false compassion.

The kid responded. A little of the fear went out of his eyes and his thin, worried face lightened.

Thwuck!

The chief pulled the nightstick from behind his back and hit the kid across the side of the face. Not too hard, the chief was an old hand at this sort of thing. He didn't want to knock the kid out yet, this would spoil the fun too soon.

"Where's the gun you shot Glotz with? Where is it?" *Thwuck, thwuck,* down came the nightstick twice.

I was sick, sicker than I had ever been in my life, and I started forward. One of the bully boys in blue shoved me back against the wall.

The kid screamed. "Stop it, please, oh stop it, you're hurting me."

"I'll kill you, you little son—, if you don't tell me what you did with that gun."

They needed that gun. If they could place it in the kid's possession, they wouldn't need any other evidence to railroad him straight to the gas chamber.

Thwuck!

The kid had thrown himself back on the bunk and had tried to curl up into a ball. Hell, the chief didn't care what part of the kid he hit, head, arms, legs, feet, any part would do.

"Stop it," the kid begged.

The chief didn't stop. Then, suddenly, he did. The kid had drawn himself back as far as he could get. He didn't do anything, there wasn't any glare of light from his eyes. All he did was look—straight at the chief.

Lindquist was lifting the stick to hit again. He dropped the club instead. His fat jowls sagged. He grabbed his middle with both hands and turned and started to run. Obviously he didn't know what he was doing or where he was going. He ran headfirst into the wall.

Butting his head against the wall didn't hurt him though later the coro-

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ner wrote up the death certificate in a way that indicated it did. No. But something else had hurt him. He was already dying when he ran into that wall.

To my mind, running into the wall was the desperate below-conscious-level action of a man who has taken his death wound and knows it and whose legs are frantically trying to carry him away from a fate he knows he cannot escape.

HE HIT the floor like a sack of potatoes falling from a truck. Even after he was down, his legs still continued to try to take him away. Even beyond death, his legs were faithful. Too bad he wasn't as good a man as his legs were good legs.

Five or six cops were looking through the bars into that cell. Not a one of them went to help the chief in this moment, not one made a move to try to pick him up. Which, I guess, indicates what they thought of him.

The kid got up from the bunk. He looked at the body of the chief there on the floor, the legs still kicking in an effort to push this carrion away from death. His face was a mask of horror. His mouth opened itself automatically and it looked as if he was trying to scream, but no sound came from his lips.

The chief hadn't bothered to lock the door when he went into the cell. Why should he? He had five or six of his best boys outside in the corridor. No prisoner would be likely to escape past them. Or perhaps the chief had left the door open in the hope that the kid would try to escape, in which case he could be gunned down. This is an easy way, sometimes, to solve a case.

But this prisoner did escape. He ran out of the cell, along the corridor, and out the front door of the police station. No cop tried to stop him or took a shot at him.

I guess maybe they had something else to think about just then.

Later that night they put out a tag on him, giving his name, age, and description. Presumably they started looking for him, but I have a hunch they didn't look very hard. News of what had happened here, and the suspicion of what might happen to any cop luckless enough to pick up this kid, traveled faster than teletype tickers.

Whether they looked for him or not, they didn't find him. A couple of days later, they quit looking entirely. Somebody fired a test shot from the gun taken from the hophead the lieutenant had arrested and the slug matched the one they had taken from the body of old Joe Glotz. Which proved that the hophead had been caught in a burglary and had shot his way out and had fled along the alley where this kid, this John Robert Howard, had probably been scavenging in trash cans.

Oddly enough, even with the evidence of the matching bullets, they didn't use a single baseball bat on the hoppy in an effort to get him to confess. Fact is, the next day somebody shoved all the bats into the furnace. And I don't believe they ever again used a door for any purpose except to go into the next room.

Even cops can get ideas.

The kid? Even if the cops lost all interest in him, I didn't lose interest. Nor did Dr. Calvard. When the police stopped looking for him, we started.

We didn't find him. But we found the hole where he had lived. It was a shack down close to the city dump, in one of those sections where you always hurry if you have to pass through. It was made of tar paper and odd pieces of board and sheet

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iron roofing. His neighbors hadn't seen him recently. Conditions inside the shack indicated he had not returned to it after he had escaped from the police.

He was scared to death when he lit out from the police station and he probably thinks the cops are still looking for him.

We went into that shack. There was a bunk. No sink, no wash basin, no toilet. The walls were lined with shelves and the shelves were filled with books and magazines.

The books he had in there scared me. They weren't the books you could expect to find in this kind of a shack. Freud, Jung, Adler, Mesmer, some of the Hindu philosophers, translations of obscure works relating to primitive practices and beliefs, hundreds of them.

EVERY ONE of them contained somebody's idea as to how the mind operated. Every one was dog-eared, under-lined, and showed evidence of hard, persistent study. The kid must have studied them, but we don't know what he had gotten from them, what conclusions he had reached, what ideas he had formed.

We think he had reached one conclusion, how to kill by the application of sheer mental force. Sure, I know that every competent scientist will tell you this is so much nonsense, but Brantwell, Cox, and Lindquist didn't die by accident. The kid killed them. We don't know how but he did it. He hadn't wanted to do it, he would have taken almost any other course if he had had any choice, he would have let these men live, but when he was pushed into a corner, set upon and beaten, when to his mind his life was threatened—and his life *was* threatened in that basement, don't ever let anybody tell you otherwise—he reached out and killed three men.

We would like to know how he did it. We don't want to kill anybody, at least Dr. Calvard doesn't, though I could nominate a few who are in need of this treatment, but we would like to know how this force works. Dr. Calvard thinks that the force that can kill can also heal. He wants to know about that. He's a healer, it's born in him.

Which brings me to the reason why this story is being written. Do you remember I mentioned that the kid's shack was filled with books and magazines?

Well, it was. One of those stacks contained a complete file of the magazine you are now reading. Apparently the kid had loved this kind of stuff, he had devoured it, he had saved the magazines, he had read the stories over and over again.

Do you get it now? He's gone, he's lost. We don't know where the hell he is and we don't know any way to find him, except this. Wherever he is, we know he is going to be reading this magazine. He'll read this story. And while the names have been changed, he'll know what is meant.

So, John Robert Howard, when you read this story, will you please come back?

Wherever you are, wherever you are, John Robert Howard, come out, come out.

This is my message, this is the purpose of this story, to reach a kid who is scared to death and to tell him that he doesn't need to be afraid, that while there are some pretty bad people in this world, there are also some pretty decent people here and there, and that at least one of them, meaning Dr. Calvard, wants to talk to him, to know him, to be friends with him.

No court of law, no basement room, no baseball bats, await you, John Robert Howard. Just a chance to be

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friends with a grand guy, and maybe, in the long run, to help a lot of people who need help, even as you and I.

So, wherever you are....

THE END

HELICOPTER HOPEFULS

By

DALE LORD

IT IS HARD to find a science-fiction story whose setting is in the not too remote future which does not at least mention helicopters. In fact, it is taken for granted that these peculiar looking aerial bugs are the vehicles of the future. And if you talk with present day designers they assure you that unquestionably the helicopter is the future's automobile.

But we already have helicopters. Why aren't they in common use?

Helicopters aren't really new stemming as they do from the early autogyros of the Twenties. We see innummerable pictures of these odd-shaped aircraft doing all sorts of work for the military; we see them employed as mail-carriers in cities and we see them used wherever exploration of isolated areas must be made, in the tropics and in the arctic. Yet we don't see them employed by private citizens even though they have a million advantages over an ordinary light plane. Why not?

Probably the best answer to that now is—they're still too expensive, and they're still somewhat experimental. Their design hasn't yet been frozen. Technicians however are beating their brains out to produce a simple helicopter capable of being mass-produced and fool-proof enough for the average man. And they're succeeding. We shall see an amazing expansion in numbers of helicopters within the near future.

The military services have demonstrated their practicality. The ability to travel fast through the air, the ability to hover motionless over a given spot at any height, and the ability to land vertically in one given spot without any runway cannot be duplicated by any sort of aerial vehicle, not even a blimp. With these advantages—and eventual cheapness—the helicopter is bound to be almost as common as the car when the price and complexity details are licked—as they will be.

It is interesting to note—as so often happens—that science-fiction writers have established even long ago, this acceptance of a technical gadget which is still in the process of development. It will be just one more thing that the boys will be able to gloat over—"see, I told you so..."

STELLAR PINCUSHION

By

CONRAD KYLE

SCIENTISTS have clearly pointed out that the dangers of a meteoric collision for an interplanetary rocket are practically insignificant. For one thing the frequency of the collisions is extremely low; for another the rocket is moving relatively slowly, and for a third the meteors are very small. Thus conquering the solar system won't be hampered by meteorites.

But the matter of interstellar travel, which will eventually come up, is a horse of another color. In order to reach even the nearest stars, a matter of some four light years, a hypothetical rocket, by building its velocity to that of one third that of light, could make the trip in something around twenty-five years! Such a trip is feasible—it refers of course to a round trip.

Knowing however the density of matter in space and the speed of the rocket—fantastically high—it is possible to calculate approximately what the chances are of its being hit. Small particles would strike about three times a second, larger ones about three times a minute and still larger—very dangerous ones—about three times an hour! Thus just on that basis the rocket would pulverize in short order. The damaging effect of meteor versus rocket goes up—just like auto crashes—as the square of the speed. Twice the speed, four times the damage and so on!

It is apparent then that from this analysis, no conventional rocket is going to be able to do the trick. Fortunately there is the remote possibility of devising some sort of energy screen, the only saving device since no material thing will be able to withstand such collisions. This too is highly theoretical and hinges on a lot of science we haven't yet come to.

But judging from the progress of science we can't discount the chance of striking on such an invention. It's within the realm of reason—it is the one thing which might make interstellar travel possible. We've got to have something. Man must reach the stars!

★ ★ ★

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READER'S PAGE

HELP...SOMEBODY!

Dear Editor:

I am seeking a title or author, or both, of a fantastic story I read over 20 years ago. Can somebody please help me? Here is the theme of the story:

A man digging in his garden unearths a huge metal cylinder with a door on one side. He enters and descends a long flight of stairs. When he reaches the bottom, he finds a beautiful girl in a trance. He awakens her, and she tells him that she is of an ancient civilization, the scientists of which knew the earth was to change its axis. So that the glories of their time might not be totally lost when these people were annihilated, three of them were put to sleep and placed in cylinders deep in the earth in different parts of the world. When the cylinders were found and the occupants awakened, their powers could be taught to the new time.

The girl teaches the man many things—among them the construction and use of individual flying belts. He falls in love with her. A modern girl, in love with him, kills the ancient girl. In his grief, the man destroys the body of his beloved in the cylinder.

Gertrude Whittum
23 Homer Street
Springfield 9, Massachusetts

If anybody can help you, Gert, our readers can. Do any of you know the story Gertrude's asking about?.....Ed.

ALMOST A PERFECT COUNT

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine for about a year, and I feel it's time that I wrote you a letter.

I think FA has got everything: (1) Good stories; (2) Good artwork; (3) Good editors. Your January 1951 issue is a perfect example. The cover was excellent.

"The Justice Of Tor"—good, but could have been longer.

"No Dark Gallows For Me"—phooey. Where did you pick that one up?

"The Trouble With Ants"—pretty good.

"The Radiant Menace"—wow!

"Who Sleeps With Angels"—darn good.

"Hell Is Where You Find It"—swell.

The best story in the issue.

I thought "Fables From the Future" was for fables from the future. You didn't have any in this month's feature.

I don't agree with Gerald Hibbs. I think your inside illos are good. But I do agree with Tom Covington—can't you squeeze in a dozen more letters?

Stephen Schlager
63 Puritan Lane
Stamford, Connecticut

Dear Editor:

Here are my ratings of the stories in the January issue:

"The Justice Of Tor"—fair. Dave's actions and motivations not too plausibly written.

"No Dark Gallows For Me"—fair.

"The Trouble With Ants"—good. Why wasn't this in ASTOUNDING, where the rest of this series appeared?

"The Radiant Menace"—good! More like this!

"Who Sleeps With The Angels"—good.

"Hell is Where You Find It!"—fairly good.

Suggestions: A more quality appearance for FA, namely trimmed edges and perhaps a separate band across the top of the cover for the masthead. The cover was good this issue, but was ruined by the masthead being printed over the magnificent barren skyline in the background. Also, I'd like better grade paper, more pages, fewer articles in the back pages.

Richard Dickey
901 South 19th Street
Fort Smith, Arkansas

Keep watching this magazine—while we think about the suggestions in both these letters..... Ed.

YOU'RE DOING BETTER, HE SAYS...

Dear Editor:

Though I had not purchased your publication for several years, last night not without some hesitation which a gnawing curiosity finally squelched, I did purchase your January number. Things have apparently changed somewhat for the better. At last you are printing stories, not just words. And what is this? Pratt, De-Camp, and others like them in the offing. That certainly will be something to wait for.

All in all, things are much improved, though as one of your readers suggests, let's have more *fantasy* in FANTASTIC

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ADVENTURES. I'll certainly be watching future issues with interest.

If anyone has any *coverless* old issues of WEIRD TALES no more recent than 1937, and any large-sized AMAZING in like de-nuded condition, but with all story pages intact, please contact me with details and prices.

Winchell Graff
300 West 67th Street
New York 23, New York

FROM WAY ACROSS THE SEA

Dear Sir:

Today I got one of the first British reprint copies of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and the stories were really terrific. I enjoyed "Elementals of Jedar" and "The Mental Assassins" very much, and would like to know if there is any other way of obtaining AM and FA direct from America, as the British copy is somewhat condensed.

I think that your magazines are truly "amazing". Most of my friends read this issue, and have the same opinion.

Geoff St. Reynard and Ray Bradbury are my favorite authors, but my best friend Bill likes Robert Abernathy and Craig Browning.

Your magazines are becoming extremely popular over here, and no wonder!

Also, your artwork is terrific. I like Rod Ruth and Henry Sharpe as much as any artist's I've ever seen.

Graham Bunliffe
c/o Martins Bank Ltd.
Branch Department
4 Water Street
Liverpool 2, England

The British copies are exact reprints of the American issues, Graham, except for the ads. Thanks for your compliments—and we'll keep the magazine up to your tastes..... Ed.

SINGING PRAISES

Dear Sir:

I've read perhaps thousands of stories in pulp magazines, and up to now, I've never felt the inclination to write to the Editor regarding its merits or demerits.

However, the short by Paul W. Fairman several issues ago—"The Broken Doll"—was in my humble opinion the most moving tale I've ever had the pleasure of reading.

Therefore, I felt that the least I could do was to let you know how at last I'd read a story that compelled me to sing its praises.

George Hulbert
17 Elm Street
Ardsley, New York

We were especially moved by this story, too. And found ourselves almost wiping away tears when we'd finished reading the manuscript for the first time. Paul's a writer whom we expect to really carve a niche for himself in the field of science-fiction writing. "The Broken Doll", in our opinion, has every chance of becoming a classic..... Ed.

TO CUT—OR NOT TO CUT...

Dear Editor:

This is not a "rave" or "brickbat" for your Reader's Page. It is a criticism plus some heartfelt cussing out of one of your authors. I refer to Frances M. Deegan.

His or her short story, "The Wizard of Blue Gap" (FA, December 1950), is absolutely tops. The combination of detective and science fiction is not new as per the Shadow and like tripe, but the new twist is excellent and adds much to the jaded appetite for the most fanatic of readers.

The criticism and cussing arises from the reader's frustrated feeling that much has been left out or deleted. That story had the makings of a wonderful 30 or 40 thousand word novel without padding. Further, it has the makings of a continuation of further adventures of Pete and Chris—not too many and definitely not built on the same old frame, but with the same theme.

Sincerely trust you will see that this reaches Deegan, and that either he or she "mends" his ways, or that the editor uses smaller scissors on such material.

J. K. Denton, CTC, USN
Charleston, South Carolina

Frances Deegan is one of the very few female science-fiction writers, and one of whom we're justly proud. No editorial blue pencil was used on this story. They hardly are ever necessary on any of Fran's manuscripts. And we'll see what we can do about a sequel of "The Wizard..."..... Ed.

MUMBO-JUMBO

Dear Editors:

For four years (ever since I first discovered stf), I have been threatening to drop the Reader's Page a letter, so...

For many moons now, something about stf writers has been driving me to complete distraction and has placed me on the brink of an ulcer condition. Why is it that so many of your contributors believe that the first prerequisite to good stf writing is to hopelessly confuse the reader by throwing a bunch of undistinguishable mumbo-jumbo at him?

Like: "Captain Victor Markam, his mind acting with the speed of a Venusian zilith, crouched low and sprang like a quirling at the Martian, and with almost superhuman strength tore him savagely from his llith. He drew his zerlang from its holster and shouted his defiance at the band of kulaks who even now were close behind him." And etc., ad nauseam. This sort of thing has spread like the

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French disease, so that even your top writers are occasionally guilty. Shades of Lewis J. Carroll! But enough—I suppose you've heard of this before.

I'd better say something nice before outraged authors and editors start sending me voodoo dolls through the mail or aim dis rays at my front porch. So here it is: FANTASTIC, along with AMAZING and ASTOUNDING, rates as a leader and pioneer of modern science-fiction-fantasy.

Here's hoping you have a happy Fimbulwinter (ouch! My ulcers!).

David C. Aldrich
467 South Atlantic Avenue
Ormond Beach, Florida

Better watch those ulcers, David. But seriously, your gripe is something we've been sounding off about for a long time. It's plotting, characterization and action that make a story, not long-sounding unpronounceable words..... Ed.

WHO WANTS A PEN PAL?

Sirs:

I have been a reader of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and AMAZING STORIES for a good many years now, and hope all stories in future issues are half as good as those in the past.

I would like a few pen pals in Canada, or USA. I would like to discuss mutual views on FA stories.

Gavin Brown
47 Causeyside Street
Renfrewshire, England

MAGNIFICENT, HE SAYS...

Dear Ed:

Magnificent! is the only word I can think of for the "Mistress of the Djinn" by Geoff St. Reynard. Let's have another like it.

Clyde T. Hill
Denver, Colorado

We'll have more of Geoff's work in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES soon. Keep watching..... Ed.

INDIANA SCIENCE-FANTASY ASSOCIATION

Editors:

I have been delegated by a group in Indianapolis, Indiana, to write to the various "Letter Pages" of the magazines devoted to Science-fiction and fantasy, to notify them of the formation of the Indiana Science-Fantasy Association, with the hope that the appearance of my letter in the columns will enable other interested readers of these magazines to contact our group.

If you can find space to publish this brief note, it will be greatly appreciated.

Jay T. Crackel
3141 Boulevard Place
Indianapolis, Indiana

AND ANOTHER COMPLIMENT

Sir:

My sincere thanks for many wonderful hours of reading pleasure. No complaints, just appreciation for your efforts on the reader's behalf. To all your writers, my best wishes. No favorites, they are all deserving of praise.

William R. Crandell
1539 Republic
Cincinnati 10, Ohio

WHO'S A CRANK?

Dear Editor:

My face is a little red because I haven't written before, but I've been reading FANTASTIC for years. It gets around in our family. I read the whole magazine, cover to cover. My husband reads the articles, and Billy, our son, at the ripe old age of 5, looks at the pictures.

I won't attempt to rate your stories for fear of becoming a "chronic crank" like some of your readers. Naturally, I prefer certain types of stories to others because I like fantasy better than science-fiction. I read them all though, and lately I've been turning to the reader's page first.

Some of your fans sound as if they've been kicked out of vaudeville. That poor Bailey fellow is really in a bad way. Oh! Well! If he's married, it's probably the only way he can blow off steam.

I guess while I'm at it, I might as well tell you that I like the "half clad" girls on your covers. Maybe you'll answer a question for me: Why are the nudes by famous artists called "art"—and the ones on magazine covers "indecent"? To me, they're all OK if drawn well.

Well, teen-agers, I hope you don't resent the presence of an old fogie of 27 long years. My imagination is still functioning, I hope. (And I like comic books.)

Velma Balber
648 Willow
Chicago 14, Illinois

That's a good question, Velma. People probably see only what they want to see..... Ed.

HI, MARTIANS!

Dear Editor:

You remember that scare we had back in 1938, when Orson Welles put that story of the men from Mars on the radio? People thought the end of the world was upon us. And later, as unprecedented war broke out upon the world, I used to amuse myself by saying, "Perhaps the men from Mars did land."

Now, the concept has stayed with me and grown and crystallized until I believe a little more that they did, than that they didn't. I can't prove it, nor can it be disproven, unless you can think up something. We wouldn't be able to see them, of course. I think that perhaps as the generations roll in, children with increasingly

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high I.Q.'s now are smarter than they used to be—may develop the necessary perception.

The Martians wouldn't actually cause war or atomic devastation, or hurricanes or things like that. Those are inherent in the human set-up. Of course hurricanes are caused by mass emotions. How do you know they are not? And the presence, though invisible, of higher forms of evolution, would merely bring our more negative traits to the surface. I think the men from Mars are not unfriendly. If they were, they could have destroyed us before this. The action is disciplinary, not devastating.

It seems reasonable to me that while man may be justified in believing himself to be the highest form of intelligent life, with no humorous cracks about it, perhaps that is just the highest form which is perceptible to the senses. I believe that the air or ethers, or fourth dimension maybe, can be peopled with as many forms of conscious life as that which is perceptible. I think this is proven by the fact that animals, and sometimes very young children, do see things. Many of us can so testify.

The following is an actual testimony. I can get my signature notarized. If necessary, can take an oath. This happened, to me. I have only recently tied it in; I offer it against skepticism which may be right. It happened, though.

My young son, in his high school teens, and I were sharing an apartment which covered an entire second floor, in a house in Venice, California, with a young woman and her mother. The mother was senile; I had been giving her nursing care. The occasion was a fall evening in 1938, just cool enough for an open fire. I was sitting relaxed, scarcely thinking, by the fire. Our cat was sitting on a chair, dressing his fur. The old mother was asleep in her room, which was off the living-room, the door at an angle with the door leading into the flat from the stairwell. The young woman and my son were out for the evening.

In the midst of my relaxation, I heard the door to the stairs, from the downstairs porch, open, and steps started to mount the stairs. I thought, "I wonder who can be coming back at this time," and suddenly recalled that a locked door had been opened and closed without unlocking it. The steps were slow, deliberate, and strange.

The cat stopped occupying himself and sat and looked. The steps reached the landing, paused, then came on up, passed through the door and came on into the room, passing into the old lady's room.

There was no further sound after the passage through the door. I checked by the cat, who followed the visitor with his gaze as it came through the door and passed into the other room. He was not agitated; it was as though he said, "Oh!" Then he placidly resumed dressing his fur.

Now, here is my positive testimony. The cat and I both heard the visitor; the cat saw it.

My main sensation was a cold feeling along the spine, and disinclination for going into unlighted rooms. But there was not then, nor since has been, anything further of the experience and any questions asked will have to be answered by the questioner.

It ties in with the men from Mars? It doesn't? The flying saucers would simply be means of communication, of course. They would be visible, because formed of a medium not so different from our metals.

Laura Hills
Montrose, Alabama

Well, fans, what do you think? How about an exchange of ideas on this...Ed.

HE WANTS LONG NOVELS

Dear Ed:

I believe the marked improvement shown by FA in recent issues is definitely deserving of comment. It's the only magazine in the field—as I write this—that is capable of filling the big gap once filled by the popular and much lamented UNKNOWN.

It is understood that Ziff-Davis is paying just about top rates in the stf field, and thus you should be getting the best—if you want it. While some of your stories still cling to the juvenile standards of past years, others have without much doubt been on a par with those published in UNKNOWN.

The publication of such novels as Sturgeon's "The Dreaming Jewels", Meyers' "The Shades of Toffee", Leiber's "You're All Alone", and Bloch's "The Devil With You" have given FA a big boost.

I hope you'll continue the policy of running one long novel in each issue. Let's see more of the authors mentioned above, as well as Hubbard, de Camp, and Tenn.

Your best covers have been those by McCauley. The one by Jones on the September number is pretty sad. Your interior illustrations have not kept pace with the improved story content. Finlay, Bok, and Cartier would be ideal; they're tops in fantasy illustrating.

In closing, I'd like to mention that I have some 200 duplicate copies of AMAZING and FANTASTIC that I'd like to trade for copies of other stf magazines, or will sell for reasonable prices. Fans interested should contact me immediately.

Gerry de la Ree
277 Howland Avenue
River Edge, New Jersey

WEIRD? OR FANTASTIC?

Editors:

I'm putting my vote in for the weird type of story. Space travel tales I don't care for particularly.

J. Hintz
Jamaica, Long Island

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ARCTIC NUTHOUSE!

by SALEM LANE

NO ONE is more tempted to go screwy than that gallant band of pilots—jet men, the most of them—who make the daily "milk-run" flight to the North Pole from our advanced Alaskan bases. For meteorological and obvious military reasons, the Polar regions are important and we're studying them in infinite detail. aAn important, exceedingly so, part of this Arctic work is done by the Air Force and the weird Arctic conditions are really something to contend with.

The conventional magnetic compass is simply useless. Navigation and orientation are extremely difficult in an area where there are no land marks to guide you and all that's beneath your plane is one vast white waste. EThe darkness of the Arctic night, the bitter merciless cold which takes its toll of men and machines, and the distortio nof instruments, makes living and working hell. But the Air Force comes through. It sends a plane per day over the North Pole and these pilots always find their way. They use the ingenius flux gate compass, a device which uses substantated contention on their list. So electricity and coils instead of a needle and they have made numerous charts showing magnetic declination near the North Magnetic Pole. In order to make celestial observations against the lowered red orb of the Sun, the fliers use a sextant-like device operating with polarized light. It is called a Pfund sky compass.

The frequency and accuracy with such flights are made tend to belie the difficulty of the job. But just get up some morning and try and start a plane—even a jet—at thirty below with an icy wind whipping through your planets. It's really tough.

The pilots minimize the troubles of course and speak laughingly of their "delivery trip." Actually they're bringing back information which is vital especially in the event of a war with our bearish and inhospitable neighbor across the icy wastes. So far they haven't encourtered Soviet flights but it is known that the Russians are equally interested and perhaps more advanced in Artic flying than we are—but not for long!

CO-AXIAL "SNIFFER"

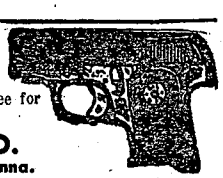
by A. T. KEDZIE

THE MEN who man the co-axial cables which link our cities with television and telephone and radio services, have their hands full. Co-axial cables which are merely tubes through whose center runs another tube, are filled with gas under pressure pressure. Every now and then a leak occurs somewhere along the hundreds—thousands—of miles of length and there is great trouble locating the fault. The loss of gas pressure warns of the leak but doesn't tell where it is. It's a tricky business trying to locate it, especially when the services the cable performs are so important and cannot be interrupted more than necessary.

But as always, somebody comes up with a clever answer. The latest technique finds use for "radioactive gaseous garbage" at the same time assisting in locating the break. The technique is this: some radioactive gas is pumped in the co-axial cable along with the regular nitrogen. Then, when a leak occurs, naturally some of this radioactive gas escapes. To locate the point of leakage, all you have to do is drive or ride along the path of the cable with a Geiger counter, a "sniffer" and your problem is solved. The counter reacts like mad as soon as it "scents" the escaping gas. Presto, you've got the break in a matter of minutes or hours, instead of in days.

The use of very mild radioactive tracers like these will probably be encourage for they can be time-savers, In medicine, the importance of the tracer cannot be exaggerated. It simply is a must now. It is amusing to consider that probably the earliest type of tracer was just ordinary gas. When illuminating gas, coal gas, was first piped to homes, a great deal of difficulty was experienced in locating leaks and breaks in the pipes within the home and those carrying the gas beneath the street. There's no such trouble today, for inserted into the odorless gas is a small amount of horribly stenchy hydrogen sulfide. All you need for a detector is a nose! It works every time. The co-axial cable break tracer works the same way except that for a nose you substitute a sensitive Geiger counter. It too, works!

Order this blue steel model Automatic Pistol. Safe, accurate and hard hitting. Easy to carry. Very smooth action. 32 cal. $27, or 380 cal. $35. Send only $3 with order. Cartridges free for cash in full. Holster $2.75.



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COAST WATCHER

By MAX LONG

SIXTEEN YEAR OLD Billy Manton crouched behind the tree and shivered. There, not a hundred yards off-shore, clearly revealed in the bright moonlight that illuminated the deep-water cove, but sheltered perfectly from seaward, was the low silhouette of a submarine. The quiet night air carried the sharp Slavic tones of the Russian sailors clearly to Billy's ears. Already one boatload of men had come ashore and they were in the abandoned shack now.

Billy couldn't understand a word, of course, of what was being said but the sailors' actions were unmistakable. The clank and clatter and ring of metal as the upper portion of the deck before the *snorkel* sub's conning tower opened up, showed the strange—yet familiar—cylinder rising out of the cavernous depths.

Billy had seen enough pictures of rockets to know that this thirty foot giant wasn't a toy. In a paroxysm of fear he wondered what to do. At this time of the year there wasn't a soul within thirty miles and the Coast Guard station was over forty miles south of this point. The railroad tracks were merely a quarter of a mile away, but Billy knew that no trains were going through tonight. He knew this area well. What a way for a night walk to end.

Billy knew the submariners must have been met and guided into the cove for though it was deep it ran through sand-barred water on either side. Somebody knew well that this would be an ideal spot from which to launch a rocket—and Billy knew all about atomic war-headed rockets.

If he went for help it would be hours and hours before he could get any. And by then...

He stirred slightly and a piece of stone was dislodged by his foot. Frightened, he quivered again. Then a wild thought came into his mind. The railroad shack! He knew there were flares there—maybe if he set a fire—maybe if—wild thoughts ran through his mind.

He reached the shack a few minutes later. It was a dirty, broken down shed with old lanterns, tools, and boxes of odds and ends lying around in disorder.

Fumbling through the mess, his eyes alighted on a small wooden box—*Fuses!*—madly he searched. There it was. Another small wooden box—*dynamite*—it said on its side.

A strange feeling of mingled excitement and calm overtook Billy. A cold, almost mathematical realization of the situation lanced through his thoughts. He couldn't get help before the submarine launched the rocket—that, he knew—and that bomb was unquestionably headed for New York. The reason the Sovs must have chosen this isolated place was their knowledge of

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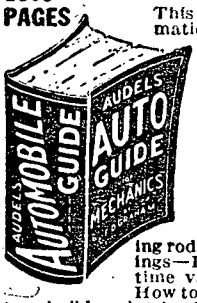

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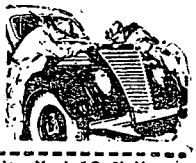

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the thorough watch kept on the New York port area.

Billy knew what he had to try. In five minutes he had changed from a frightened adolescent to a purposeful adult, clear and shining in the knowledge of what he must try—and succeed at!

Carefully he made his way back to the sub's cove. He could hear talk and laughter as the Sovs, disdainfully secure of their secrecy, prepared their attempt.

Quite a few of them were ashore and work had stopped on the rocket. It reared its slim shape skyward waiting apparently the touch of a button to rocket a city into eternity. Billy could see the dim outline of a guard carrying some sort of gun, standing on the conning tower, staring musingly toward the sea.

From his camping kit, Billy took his raincoat and wrapped the open dynamite box, fuses and matches. Then slipping a couple of hundred feet through the underbrush, he lowered himself into the water, and half-floating half-paddling propelled himself toward the side of the submarine away from the gaze of the guard. Moving as quietly as he could he manuevered through the water, one hand keeping his precious burden above water, dry and safe. Thank God there were no waves. The cove was as quiet as a pond.

The black bulk of the sub loomed up before the iron-nerved boy, inwardly trembling, but outwardly as cool as a cucumber. The side of the vessel was slippery and greasy. But the sub rode so low in the water that Billy fairly easily managed to slide himself out of the water onto the sloping deck, shielded from view of the guard by the enormous rocket emerging so ominously from its launching well.

It was a few seconds' work to hastily lift the box lid, lay the box on one corner of the deck, attach fuse and detonator and touch a match to it. The gentle *slap-slap* of the water against the sides of the submarine muffled effectively the slight sounds Billy made.

Quickly Billy slipped back into the water and the accidental splash made him freeze momentarily but it passed unnoticed. A second later he was headed shoreward. He crawled up the bank and crouched behind the trees. The laughter and the talk was still coming from the shack. Billy decided to get farther away.

Edgily he waited two minutes—three—four. Had the fuse gone out?

Abruptly thunder rolled across the moonlit cove. Billy saw a sheet of flame appear briefly on the submarine's deck. The rocket pointed into the heavens, teetered sideways, lurched, and then fell with a resounding splash, to sink itself and its deadly cargo deep into the bottom of the cove. Billy didn't hear the cries and shouts. He was padding north as fast as he could. And the roseate glow on his face wasn't fear. Right now he was tired and sleepy and hungry—but the happiness and satisfaction were there. He was going to have a story to tell...

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TALGO TRAIN

By SANDY MILLER

THE *TALGO* train, a stremlined Diesel engine followed by five light-weight articulated cars looking like bus bodies and riding on half the usual number of wheels, is making quite a stir in railroading circles. Three of these completely new passenger trains which are being built in this country for the Spanish railroads, are showing railroad men a new concept in passenger carrying, one which is likely to carry over into our transportation field.

The train, looking like a shining aluminum snake weighs a third as much as a conventional train, consumes, half the power, and travels at half again the speed, is bound to receive favor everywhere. Its economy alone would assure that. Its center of gravity is so low that it hugs the rails at any kind of a curve and at any speed. It is a precursor of what we may expect in the not-too-distant future.

Taking a leaf from the aircraft and automobile designers' handbooks, the creators of this luxurious high-speed train, have made a contribution to the old practice of railroading that makes conventional trains look like something from the horse and buggy days—which they are. The latest principles in air-conditioning, electronic gadgets and electrical power are used. More and more, engineers are looking at transportation in more general terms, trying to get the most people, most comfortably, and most cheaply from one place to another. With this general approach they've discarded rule of the thumb and applied science. The result is something to startle the eye. Of the three trains being built, two will be shipped to Spain. The third will remain here for tests and study—and eventual assimilation into our own railroad system!

SKY PROBERS

By L. A. BURT

IN AN effort to wring information from the sky for meteorological purposes, technicians are using every trick in the book. Exploding meteors, rockets of the V-2 and Neptune and Wac Corporal types, bounding, bouncing radio waves—all of these are used because it is extremely important today to have detailed knowledge of what goes on in the upper atmosphere. We know that the winds up in the rarified part of the sky cause big changes in the more dense, near-to-Earth region.

A new system of checking into the upper sky with sound waves has been devised. A series of two-hundred pound charges of TNT or dynamite are exploded simultaneously. Naturally high-powered sound waves or shock waves radiate sky-

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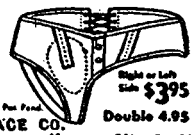

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ward. It is a fact that when a wave of any kind, radio or sound, strikes a medium which has discontinuities of any kind, (like changed density or changed speed) the wave is either bent and refracted or in some cases reflected. That's what happens to the sound waves. Back they come to Earth where a series of oriented microphones with amplifiers pick them up. They arrive at distances as far away as a hundred or more miles from the point of the explosion. From the time-interval between explosion and return of the waves, and from the angles at which they come back, the technicians can fairly easily compute the speed of the air masses at heights of fifty miles or more.

When test rockets stop costing a fortune and become considerably simplified, these methods probably won't be bothered with, especially since a rocket can give back a lot more information. But until that day comes, we'll have to be content with these probing methods, comparatively crude though they are.

VANISHING WHITE MAN!

By JON BARRY

DR. BOYD, a famous American anthropologist has called the attention of the world to a little-known, but absolutely certain fact. The so-called white Caucasian "race" is doomed to extinction. This is not a matter of conquering or destroying itself by atomic warfare or the like. It is simply a consequence of the shrinking of the world by the tremendous transportation facilities available to us.

Transportation and travel, the dissemination of scientific skills and culture, and the realization of the essential similarity of all peoples, are the forces working to combine all peoples! It's as simple as that. There are many more brown and yellow skinned people in the world than white. Therefore in terms of simple mixing, *they* are the ones who are going to predominate. In other words, the world is becoming one vast melting pot.

The United States is a perfect example of this with more and more Asiatic and African peoples being perfectly assimilated into the community. Inter-marriage of all types is becoming extremely common. Gradually we shall see a perfect fusion and mixture of all peoples. Dr. Boyd sees the final man as a little shorter than our present average, darker skinned and dark-eyed. If one strain can be said to predominate it will probably be the Asiatic. And of course anthropology points out that in no way will such a future man be inferior to our present people. The identical abilities of all peoples had been too clearly painted. It matters not in the slightest the color of a man's skin. His brain is the important thing—and all peoples have the same capacity. It must make idiotic "racial fanatics" like Hitler roll over in their graves to see this fusion of types!

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